

FUSION



THE PLACE: A PLANET CALLED SKELOS. LONG AGO, SKELOS GLITTERED WITH WEALTH, BUT THAT LIGHT HAS SINCE DIMMED. FOR THIS IS A TIME AFTER THE COLLAPSE OF THE FIRST CONFEDERATION, AFTER THE INSANITY OF THE GENE/TECH WARS. NOW SKELOS IS A BAD JOKE, JUST ANOTHER BUG-RULED BACKWATER PLANET IN A MINOR SYSTEM. FEW HERE HAVE HOPES BEYOND TOMORROW: A FLIGHT TO ANOTHER SYSTEM, THE HOPE OF A FAST TRADE OR BLACKMARKET PURCHASE, A LUCKY TURN OF THE CARDS.

THE GROUNDLING. A FAVORITE HAUNT OF GAMBLERS, UNEMPLOYED MINERS, THIEVES AND DREAM DEALERS. BARS LIKE THE GROUNDLING THRIVE ON SHATTERED DREAMS. WITH INTOXICANTS CHEMICAL, ELECTRICAL OR FLESHLY, THEY OFFER BLESSED FORGETFULNESS, OR THE ILLUSION OF PEACE.

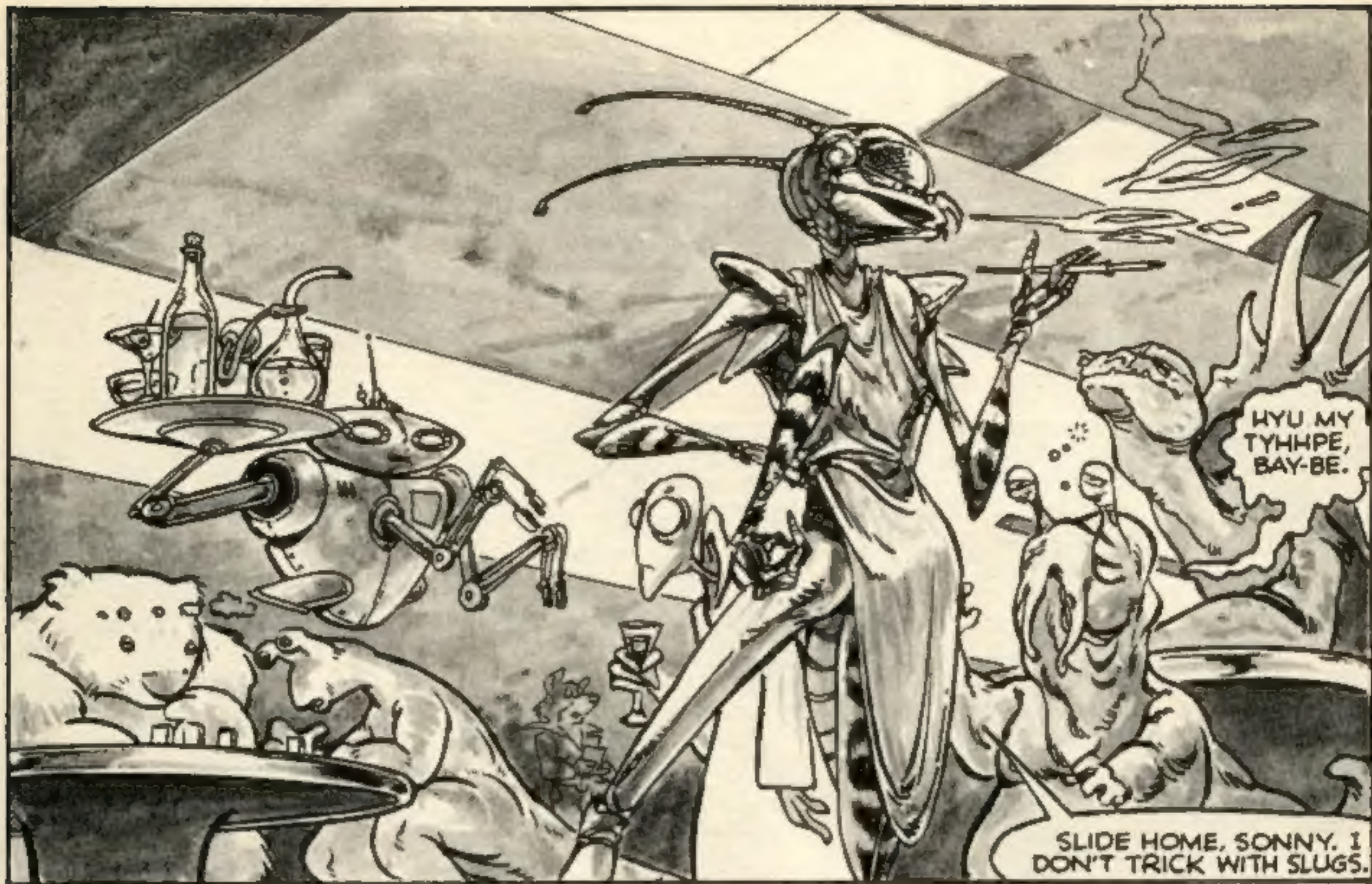
A FRAGILE ILLUSION, ONE WHICH WILL LAST ONLY A FEW MOMENTS MORE.



"THE SOULSTAR COMMISSION"

LEX NAKASHIMA, CONCEPTUAL EDITOR

STEVEN BARNES • STEVE GALLACCI • LELA DOWLING • L. LOIS BUHALIS • CAT YRONWODE
WRITER ARTISTS LETTERER EDITOR



AGAIN YOU
READY TO
LOSE?



I'M READY TO WIN.
ALL RIGHT, LET'S
PLAY A LITTLE XITCHK
INSANITY.

Arrr. MY HEAD HURTS.
ANOTHER NEW GAME?

LUCK'S GOTTA
CHANGE. NOW, MY
DEAL. TWOS ARE
WILD IF YOU HAVE A
THREE, THREES
ARE WILD IF YOU
HAVE A FOUR,
AND, ah--



FOURS ARE ALWAYS WILD.

WHAT ABOUT SEVENS?
I REMEMBER SOMETHING
ABOUT SEVENS.



A PAIR OF NATURAL
SEVENS TAKES THE POT.
YOU HAVE TO PLAY
THE THREE OR FOUR
THAT MAKES THE
OTHER CARDS WILD.

RIGHT. AND,
ah... FOURS ARE
ALWAYS WILD.

BRAVO. DOW--DON'T
YOU THINK YOU'VE
LOST ENOUGH? OR
DRUNK ENOUGH?
MAYBE BOTH. THERE
JUST MIGHT BE A
CONNECTION THERE.



IT'S STRATEGY. EIGHT-LEGS IS
GONNA MAKE A MISTAKE.

ONLY IF SHE
TAKES YOUR
IOU.

YOU
HAVE NO
FAITH.

IF YOU
THINK PRAYER
WILL HELP, GO
RIGHT AHEAD.



LET'S START WITH
TEN C'S. CARZ?

Rrrr. IN.

AND THE
MYSTERY
WOMAN?



I'LL
RAISE
YOU,
LOVER.



MAMMALS.





DAMN!



CHEE CHEE
CHEE!

YOU GOT AN
ACE TUCKED IN YOUR
EGGSACK,
OR WHAT?



GRUBFOOD YOU'D BE,
IF NOT SO SMALL AND
STRINGY. TASTE BAD.
BABIES SPIT YOU UP.



"SMALL AND--" VENOM
MUST HAVE CURDLED
YOUR BRAINS.
I'D TAKE YOU
HERE, NOW,
LATER, ANY
TIME.



COME ON. PUT IT UP THERE.

DOW--INDIO
WARNED YOU NOT
TO GET INTO
TROUBLE.

NO TROUBLE HERE.
JUST A LITTLE
FRIENDLY WAGER. SAY--
DOUBLE OR NOTHING.



I LOVE HUMANS. TO
LOSE CREDITS YOU ARE
SO EAGER.

GENEROUS WE ARE.
YOUR BUTT IN A SLING
I WILL PUT. GET IT
UP THERE.

THIS IS CRAZINESS.
YOUR FRIEND HAS
A DEATHWISH.

NOT FRIEND.
JUST SHIPMATE.
TO MY SHAME.



AT YOUR
SERVICE.

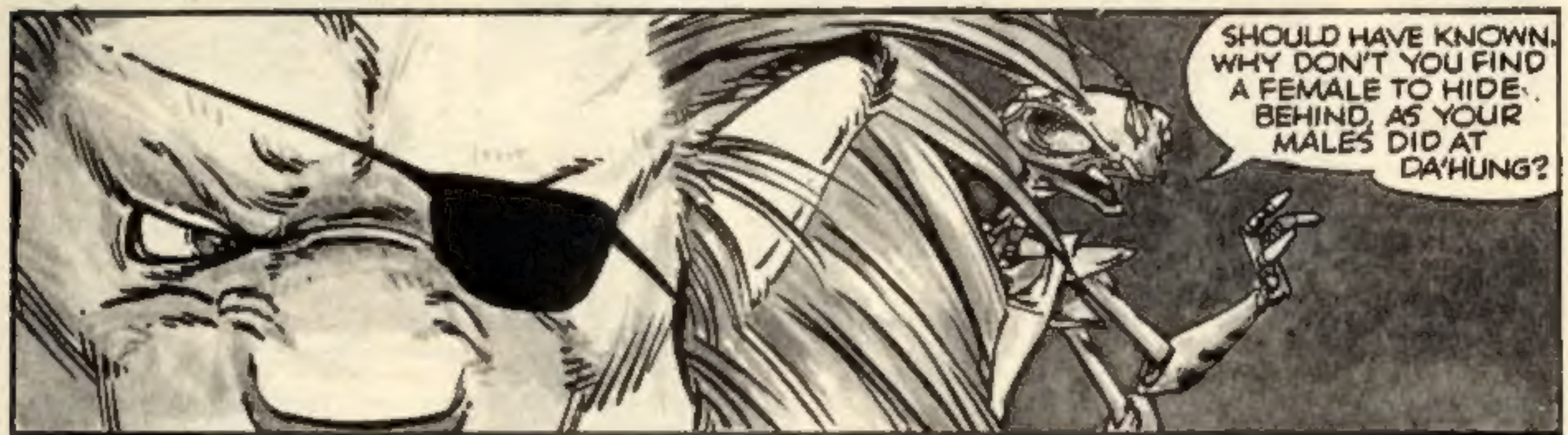
YOU. WHAT DID
YOU SAY YOUR
NAME IS?

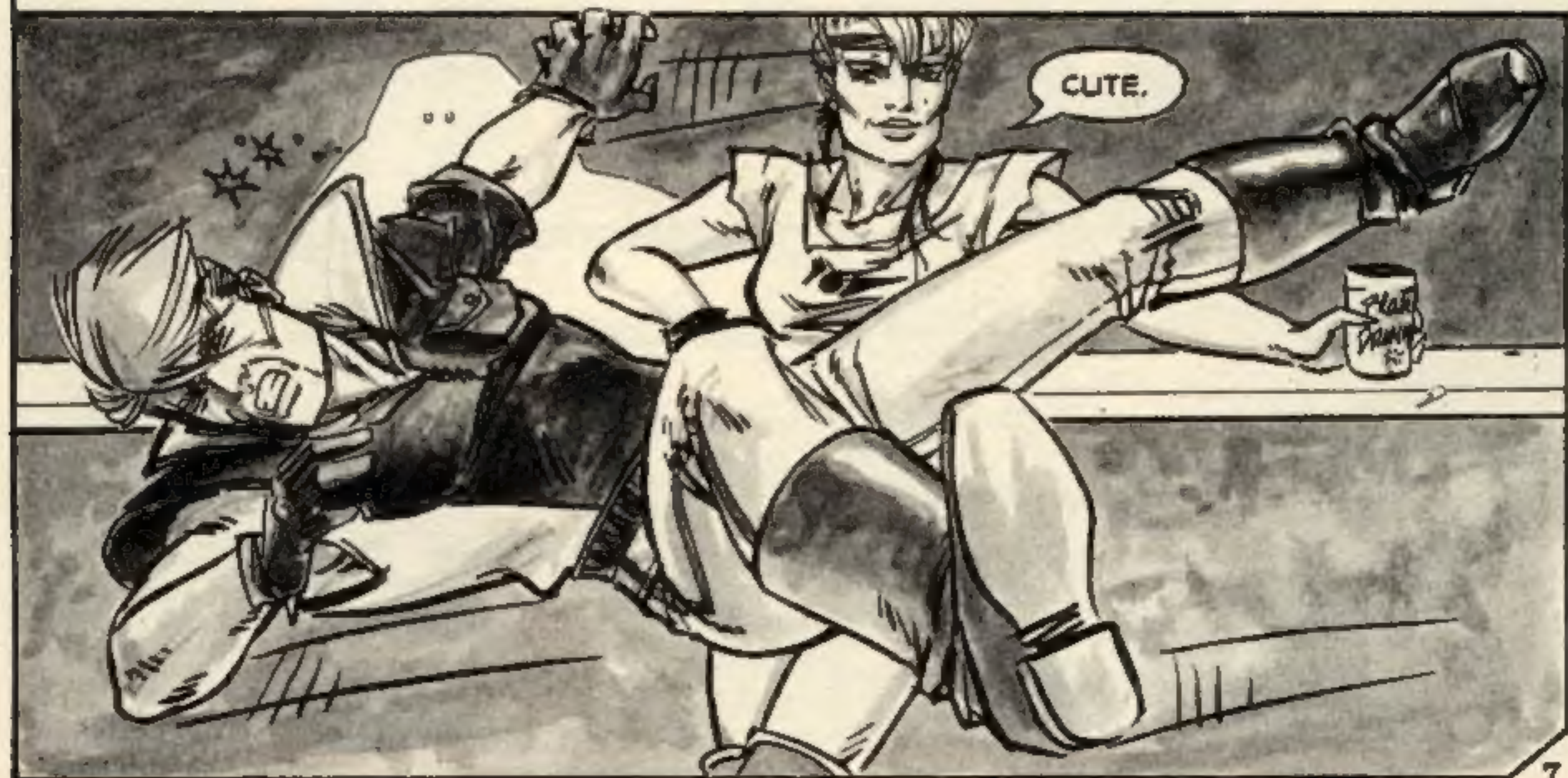
I DIDN'T.

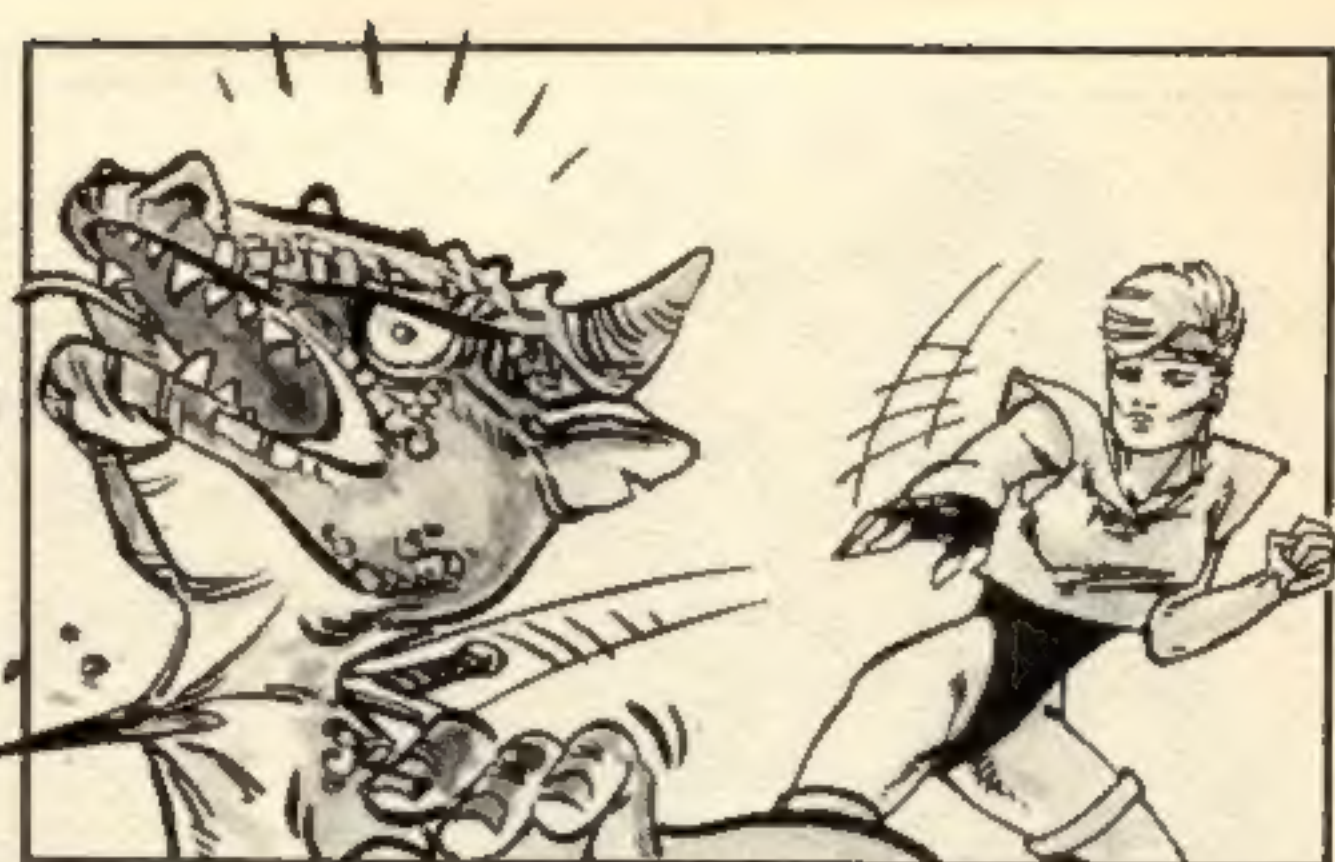
CALL
IT.

IT.







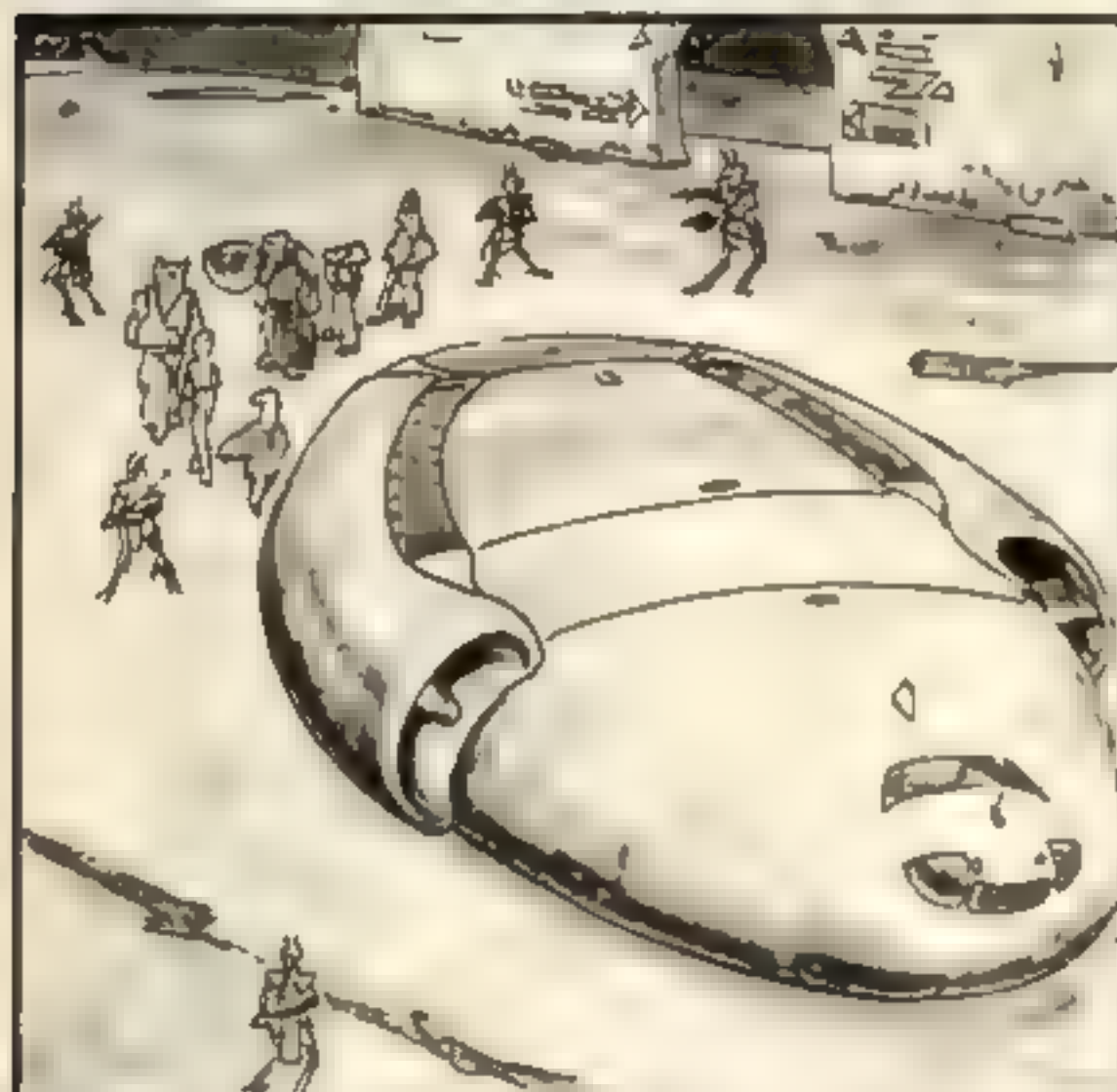






KEEP TALKING.

NEXT TIME WE FINISH.
I SUCK YOUR MARROW.



WHERE'S THE WOMAN
WHO PLAYED POKER
WITH US?

PUT YOUR
PANTS BACK ON.
SHE WAS GONE
BEFORE THE
OFFICIALS
ARRIVED.



HOW DO I GET INTO THESE
THINGS. I WON'T HAVE
BAIL UNTIL NEXT WEEK.
GAME CLEANED ME OUT.

DON'T WORRY. INDIO
WILL GET ME OUT. I'LL
HELP YOU.



WHO IS INDIO?

THE REASON
HE SHOULD KEEP
HIS PANTS ON.
OUR CAPTAIN.
WHEN SHE FINDS
OUT, OUCH.

WHERE
IS SHE
NOW...?



GOOD QUESTION.
COME ON, INDIO--
DON'T LEAVE ME
HANGING.

PLACE: THE L-5 POINT BETWEEN SKELOS AND ONE OF HER THREE DEAD MOONS.

ONCE, YEARS BEFORE, MEN FOUGHT HERE, ARCED THROUGH THE HEAVENS IN SHIPS TOO FAST TO NEED THE GUIDANCE OF A LIVING HAND. SEALED BLINDLY INTO THEIR CRASHCOUCHES, THEY BREATHED STERILE AIR AND WAITED AS COMPUTERS DECIDED WHO WOULD LIVE AND WHO WOULD DIE.

AND HERE THEY DIED SCREAMING, OR WITHOUT THE TIME TO SCREAM. PROUD BATTLE CRUISER AND HUMBLE TWO-MAN FIGHTER, TROOP SHIP AND CARGO VESSEL, FOUND THEIR ENDING HERE IN THE SKELOS SYSTEM. AND ALL, IN TIME, WERE SWEEP CALLOUSLY ASIDE, CLUMPED WHERE THEY CAN OFFER NO INJURY TO TRADE OR PASSENGER LINERS.

TAN! I WANT THE SENSORY MATRIX RE-EMBEDDED NOW! NO MORE EXCUSES!

ALL READINGS ARE IN NOMINAL RANGE.

WE DIDN'T REFIT THE GUIDANCE SYSTEM TO GET "NOMINAL" RESULTS. TAN! WHERE ARE YOU?

NAG NAG NAG. MAYBE I LINK CONSOLE WITH MEDICOMP, ey? MAYBE SHE LIKE STICKING HANDS INTO OWN STOMACH. Heh heh heh.

TAN. WHAT WAS THAT?

I SAID, LIKE, CONSOLE READY IN MINUTE, CAP'N.

Ah hah. TEST BEGINS IN TWENTY SECONDS, WHETHER YOU'RE THROUGH OR NOT. IT'S YOUR FURRY LITTLE TAIL IF YOU HAVEN'T SEALED THE CONNECTIONS.

STALL, CAP'N. SLAVERY AND MURDER ILLEGAL.

IF YOU'RE A SLAVE, YOU'D BETTER STOP CASHING MY CHITS.

WE'VE GOT 98%... CAPTAIN, 105% POWER. READY FOR TEST.

GOOD GOING, TAN. GET OUT OF THERE.

EY, FINESTKIND. MAKE A DO!

LET'S MAKE A DO. GIVE ME MANUAL.

I LOVE THIS PART.

"Uh... INDIO...?"

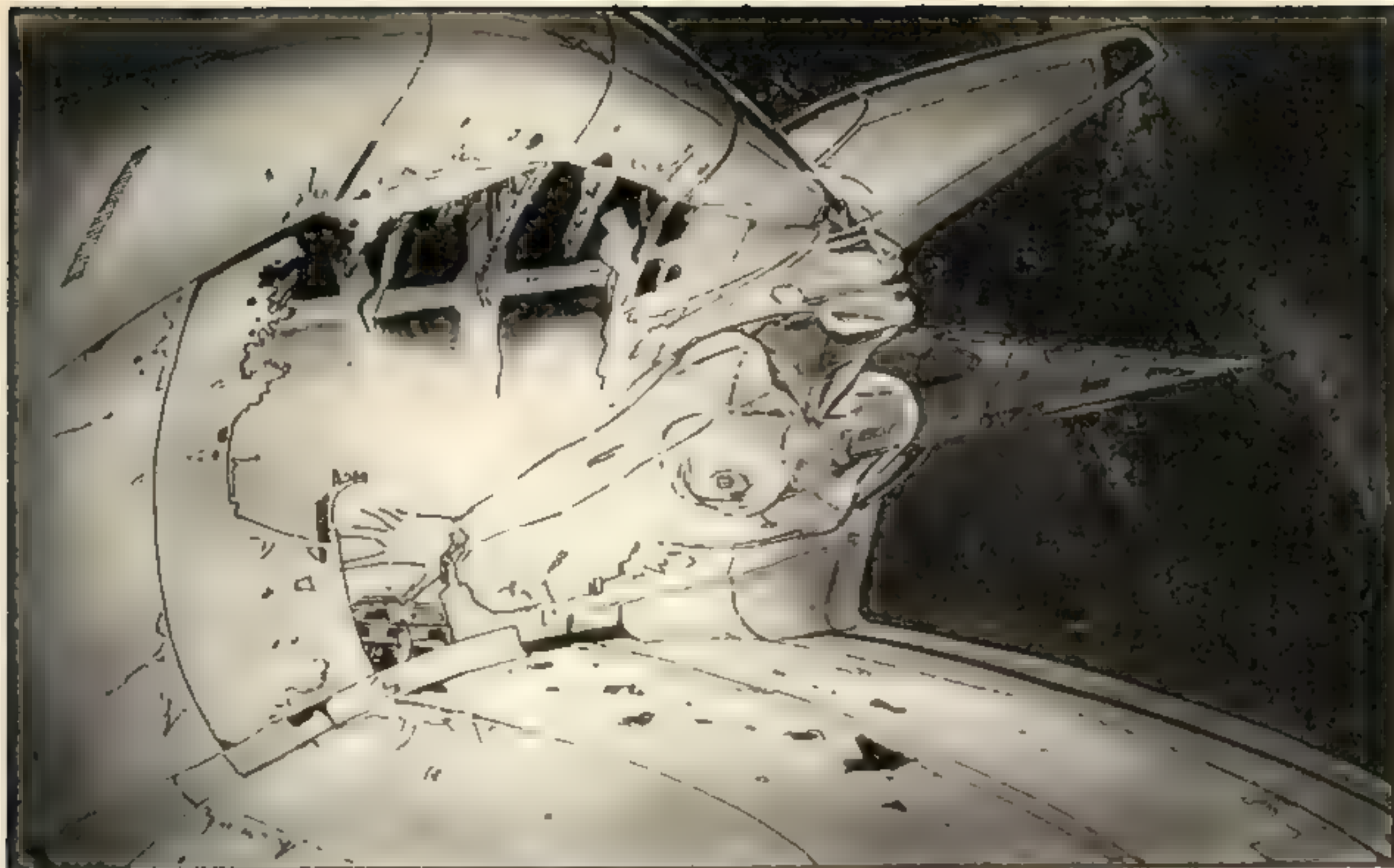
"CAPTAIN?"

WORKS!
WORKS! IS
BEAUTY, ey?

ALMOST
THE REAL
THING.

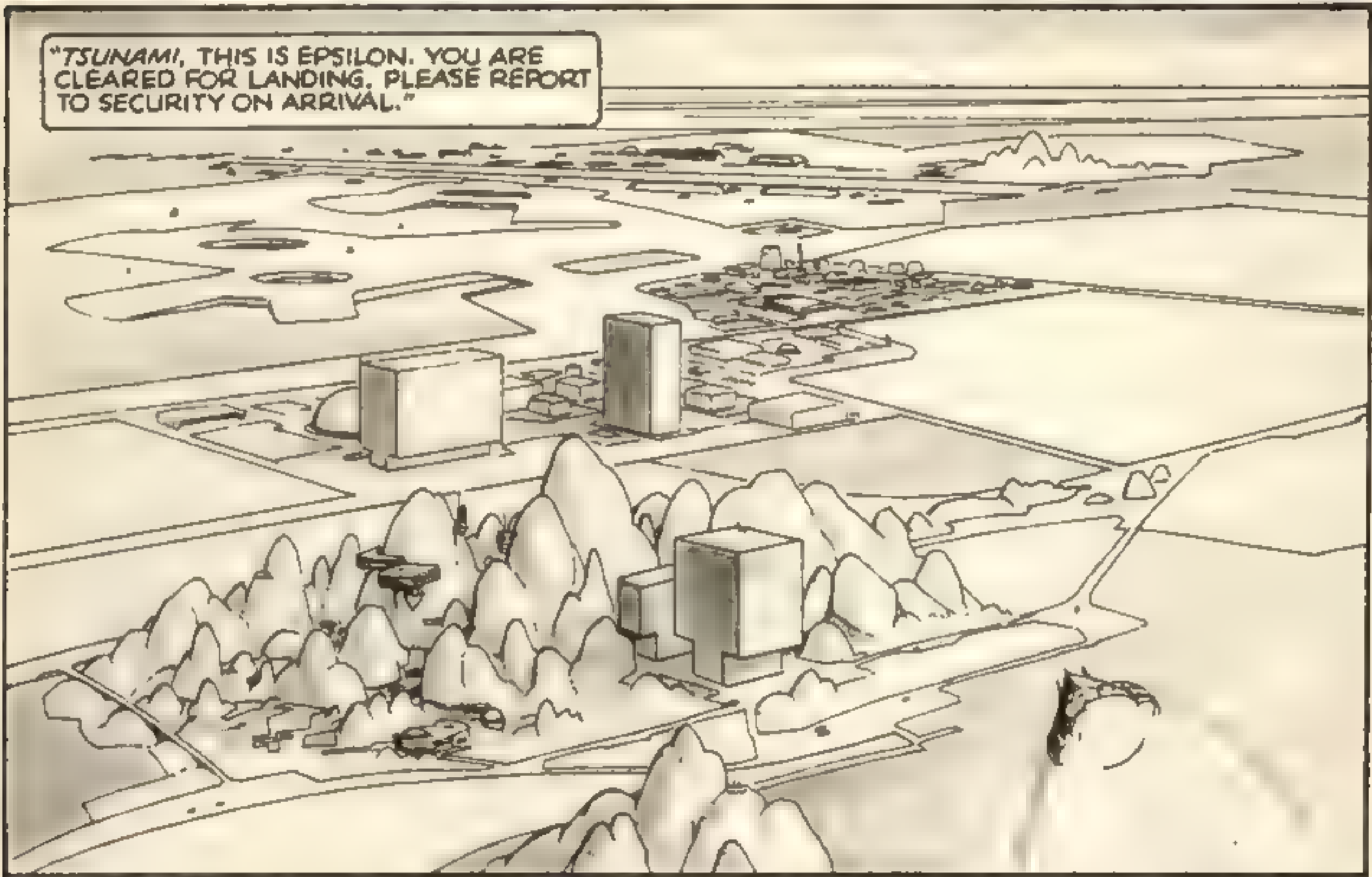
ALL RIGHT, IT WORKS.
LET'S GET BACK TO
SKELOS. DOW AND THE
OTHERS ARE WAITING.
Ah...CAPTAIN...?







"THIS IS REGISTERED CRAFT TSUNAMI. THAT'S TANGO SAM UMBER NEMO ALPHA MINI EYEBALL. RETURNING TO CRYSTAL STATE COMMERCIAL PORT 'EPSILON'. AWAITING CLEARANCE."



"TSUNAMI, THIS IS EPSILON. YOU ARE CLEARED FOR LANDING. PLEASE REPORT TO SECURITY ON ARRIVAL."



SECURITY? WHAT NOW? LATER.

ALSHAIN, LANDING CUSHIONS OP?



WE HAVE FULL NUMBERS ALL FACTORS: LANDING CUSH. ENERGY FIELDS DAMPENED, ALL GUIDANCE LOCKED IN AND READY FOR AUTO.

AUTO ENGAGED.



IT AIN'T HOME, BUT IT'S SOLID. LET'S COLLECT OUR CREW AND GET OUT OF HERE.

REMEMBER THE SECURITY CALL.

THE VOICE OF MY CONSCIENCE. ALL RIGHT, I'LL CHECK WITH 'EM FIRST.

ALL YOURS. HAVE HER READY TO LIFT IN SIX HOURS.

HOW'S THE NEW SENSE LINK WORKING?

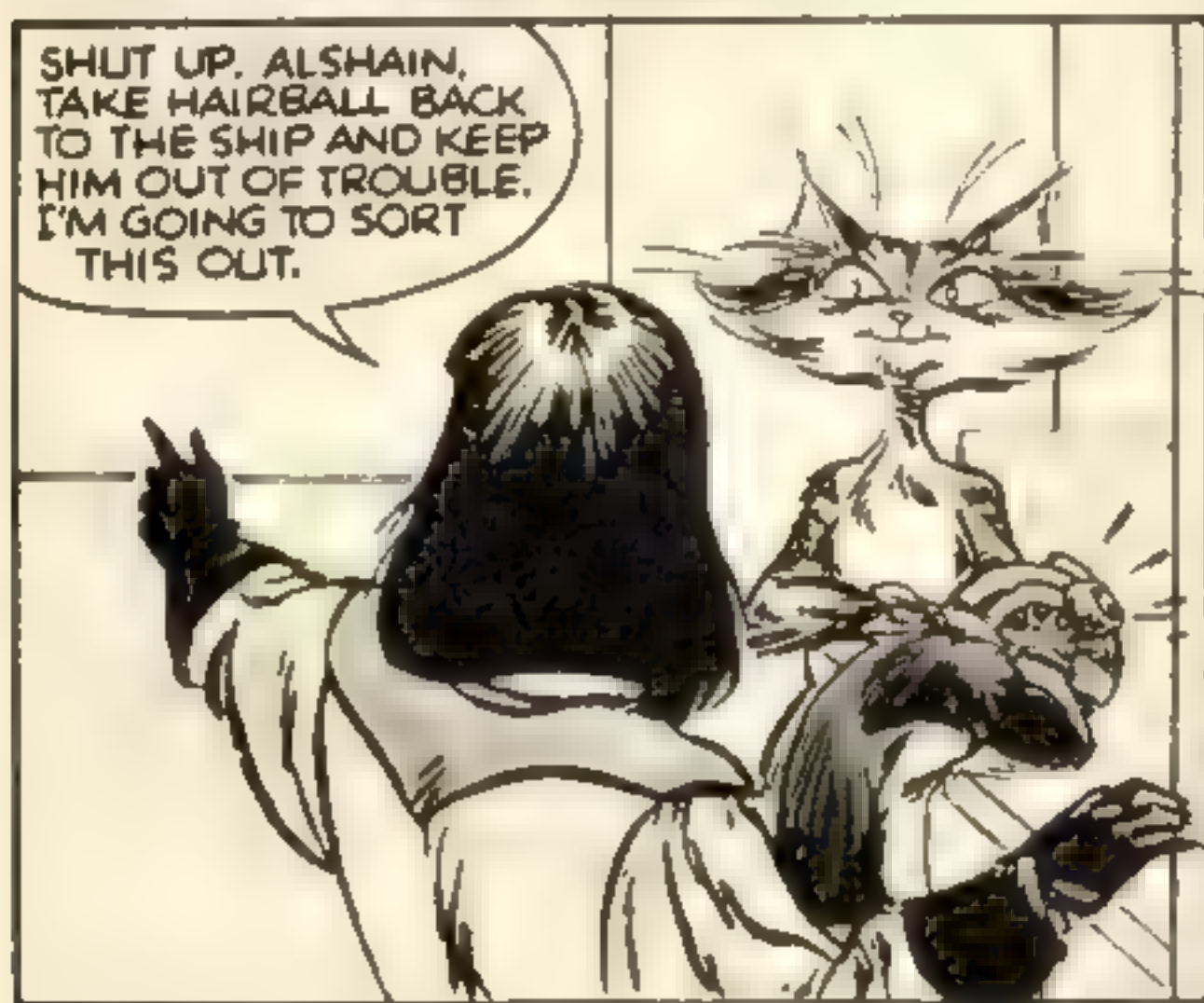
FINESTKIND IS GENIUS, OF COURSE.

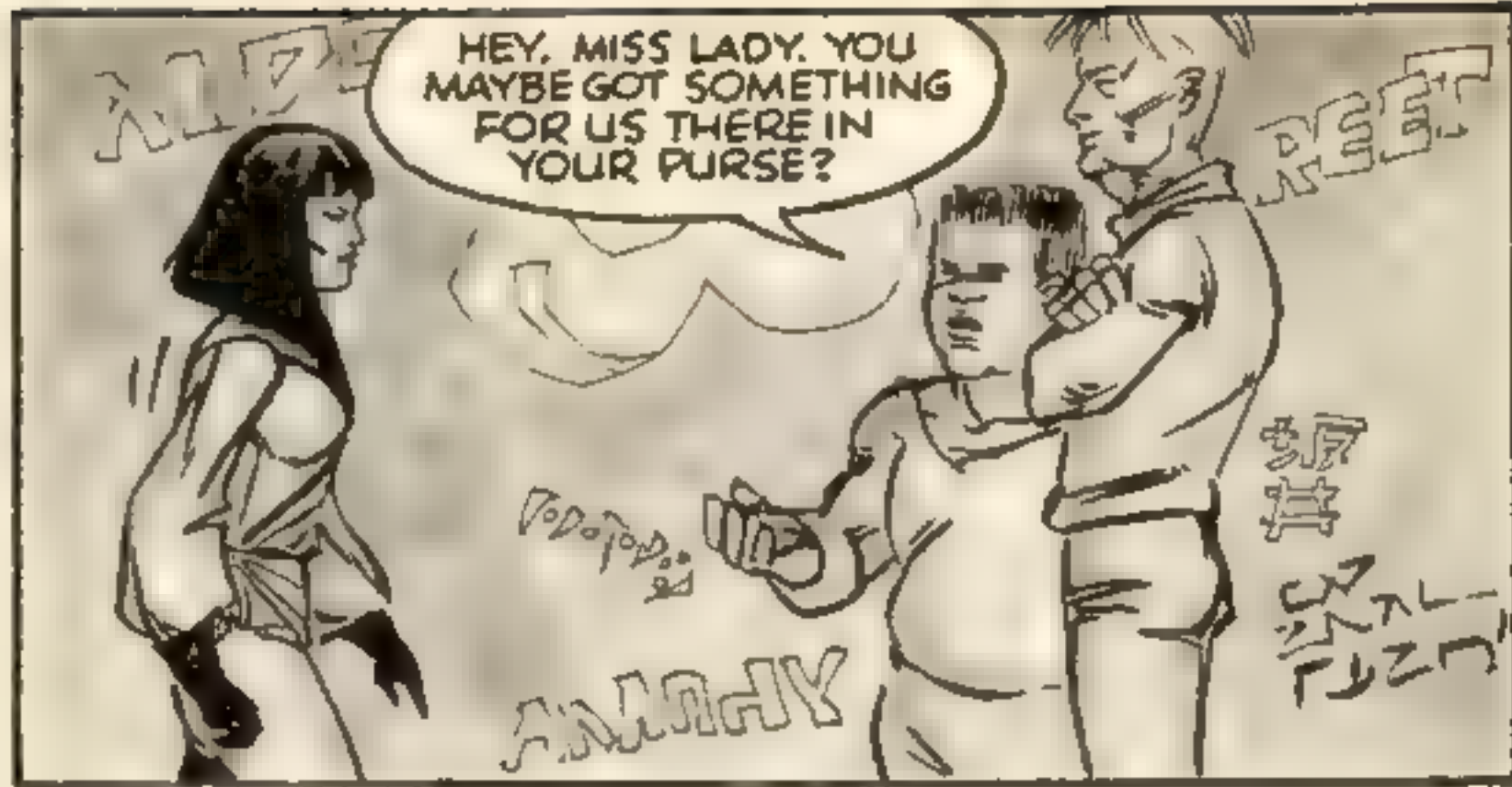
DOES THAT SHADOWFAX HAVE AN OPERATIONAL NULLSCAN?

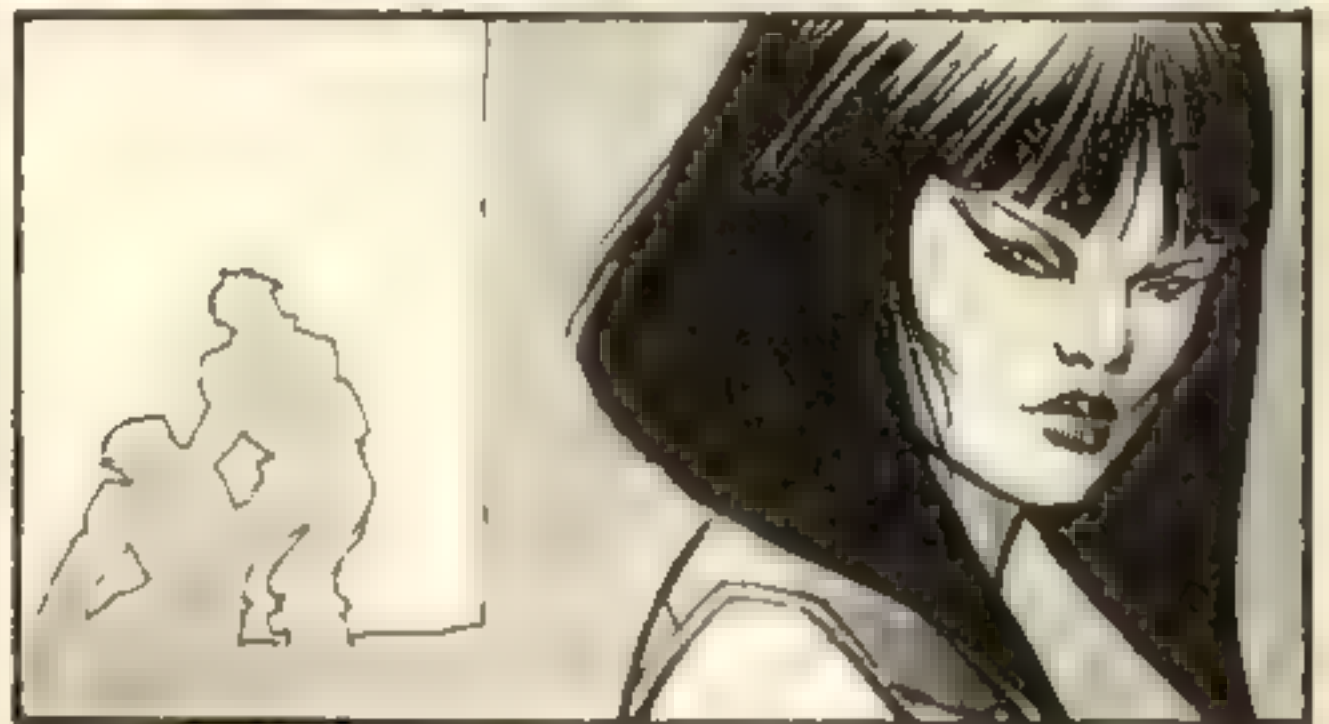
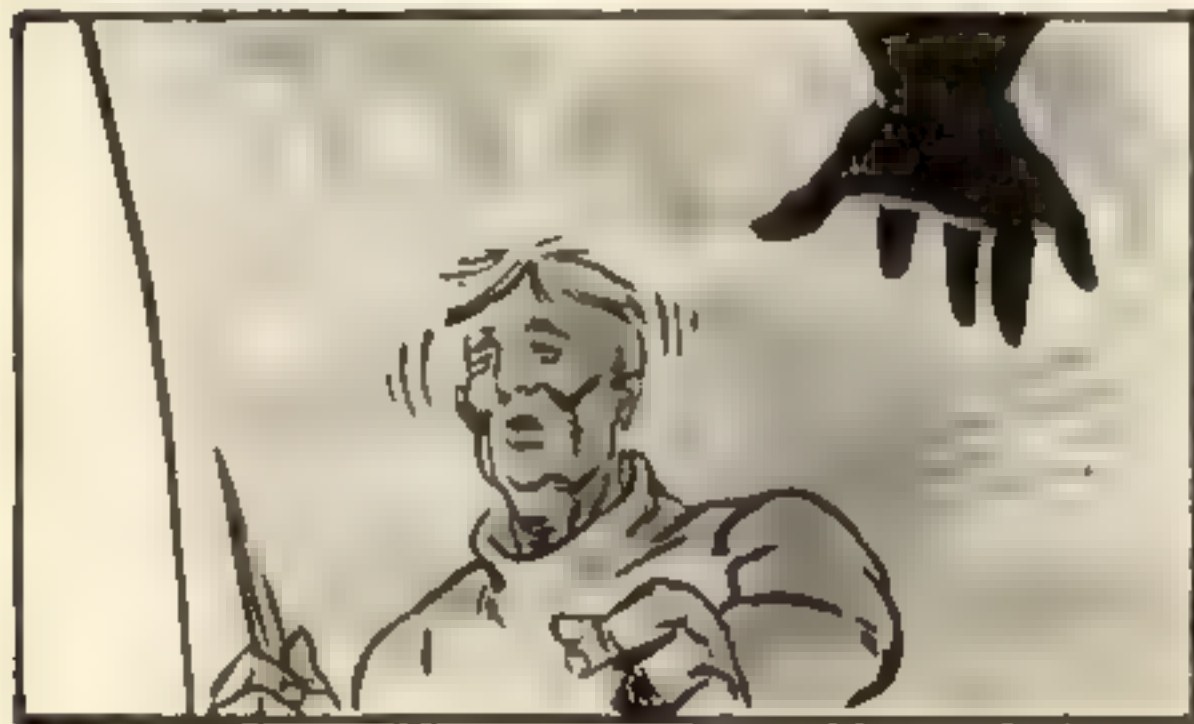
OPERATIONAL, BUT IMPOUNDED BY STATE. TOO BAD. THE RIGHT SMUGGLER COULD MAKE A LOT OF MONEY.

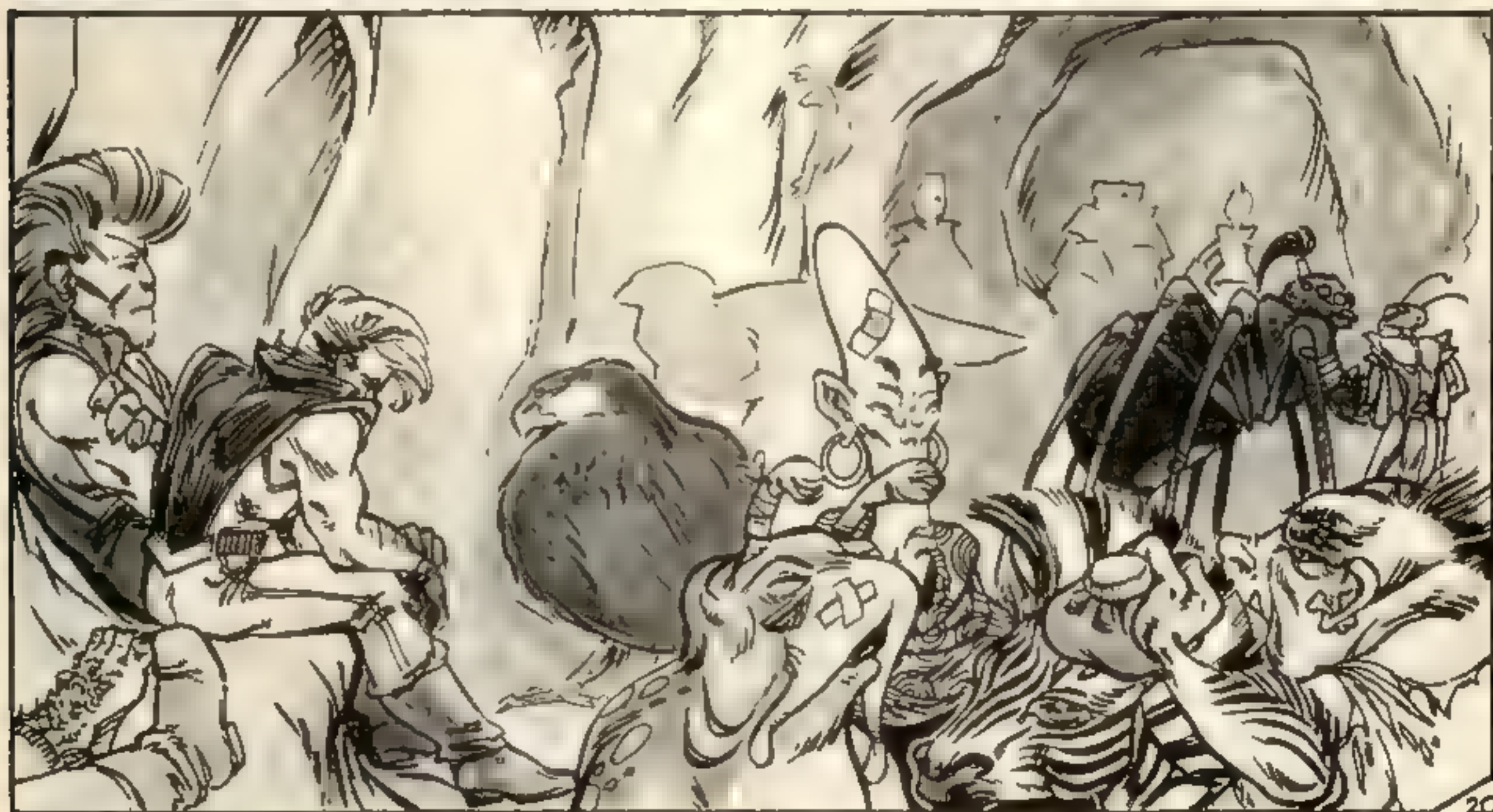
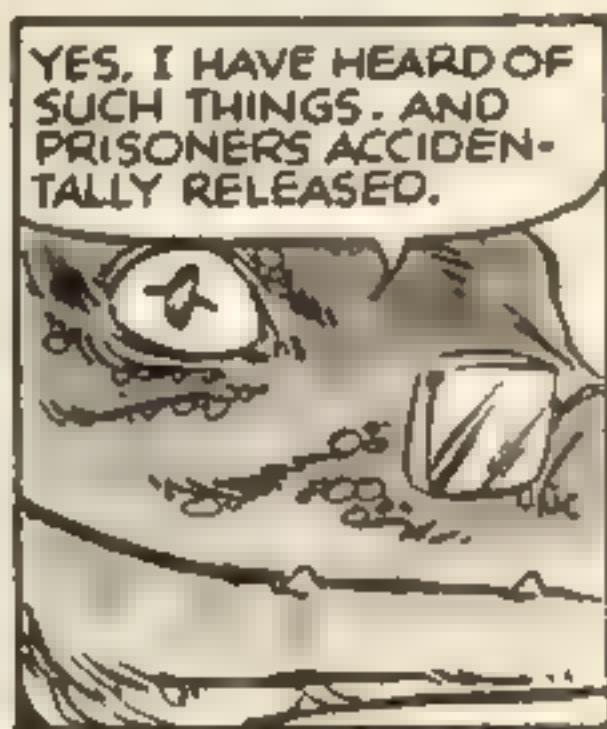
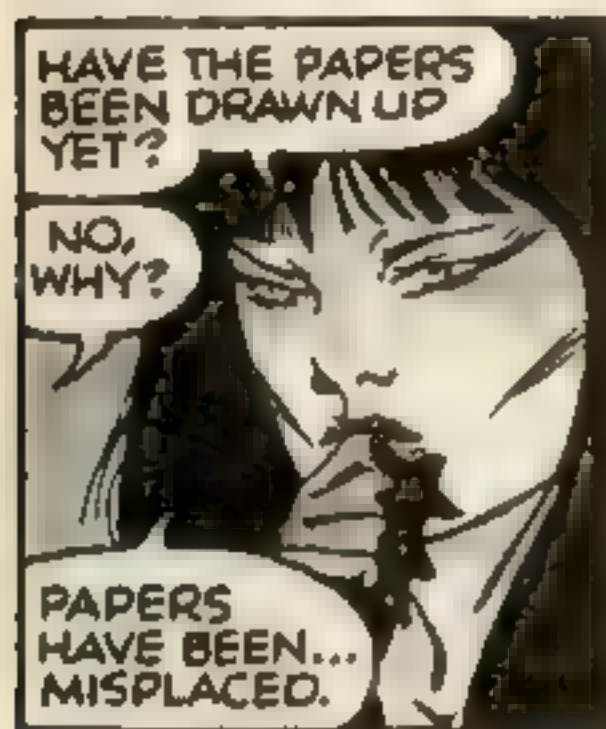
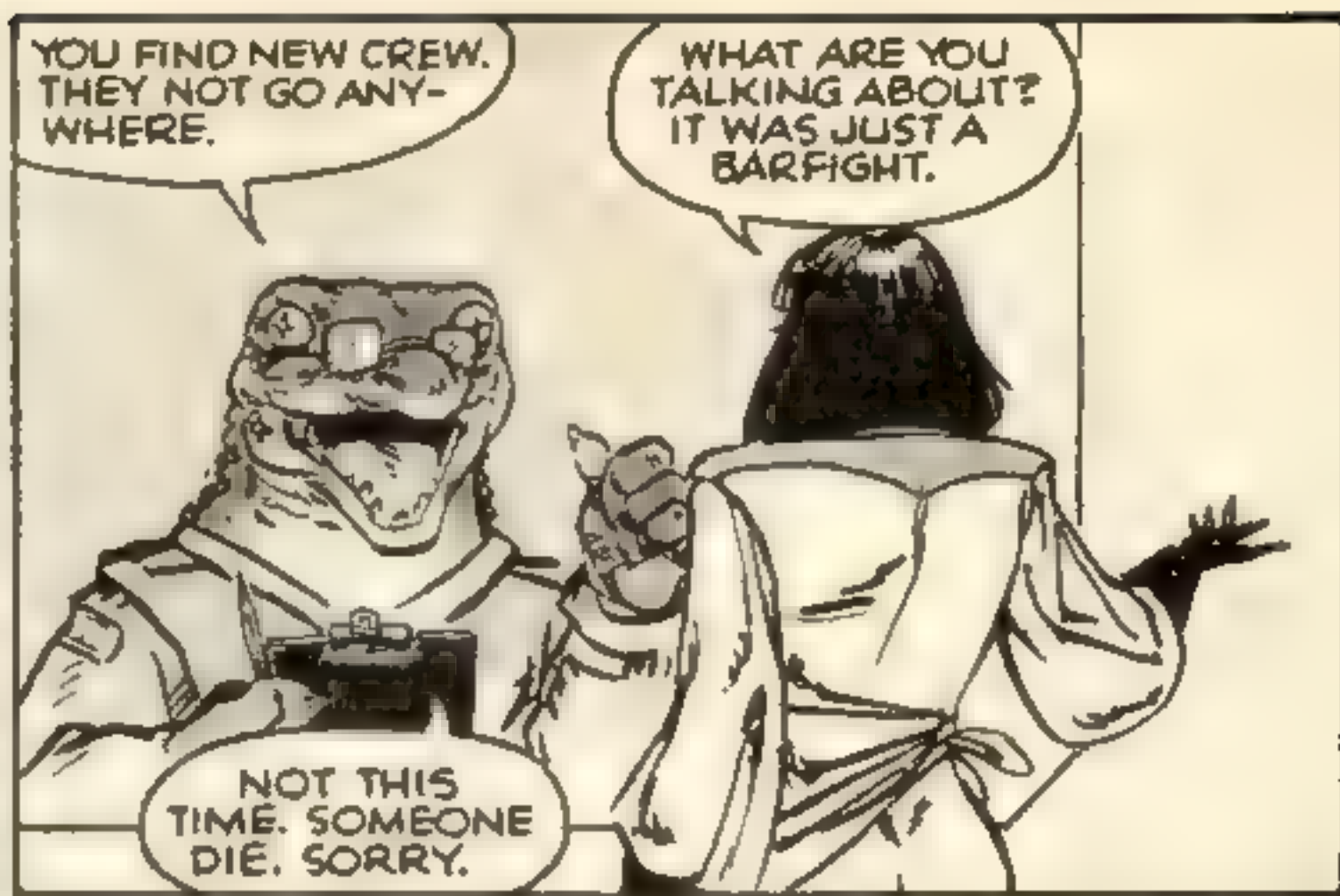
I FIND THE VERY SUBJECT DISTASTEFUL.

RIGHT.









I'M NOT HAPPY. I GO INTO RUT IN SIX WEEKS. I'LL SPEND THE BEST SEASON OF MY LIFE DIGGING IN THE MINES.

DON'T WORRY. INDIO WON'T LEAVE US HERE.



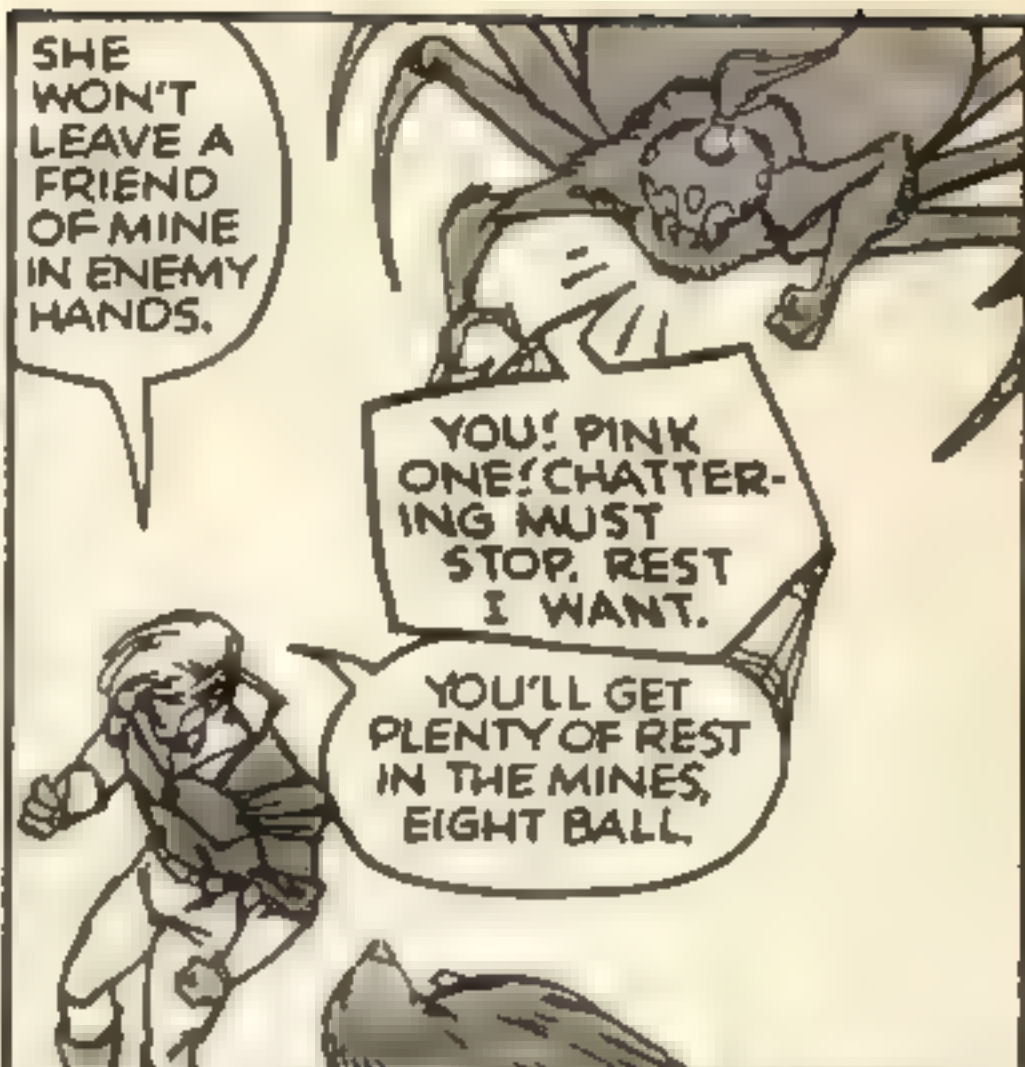
YEAH--BUT YOU'RE HER CREW. WHERE DOES THAT LEAVE ME?



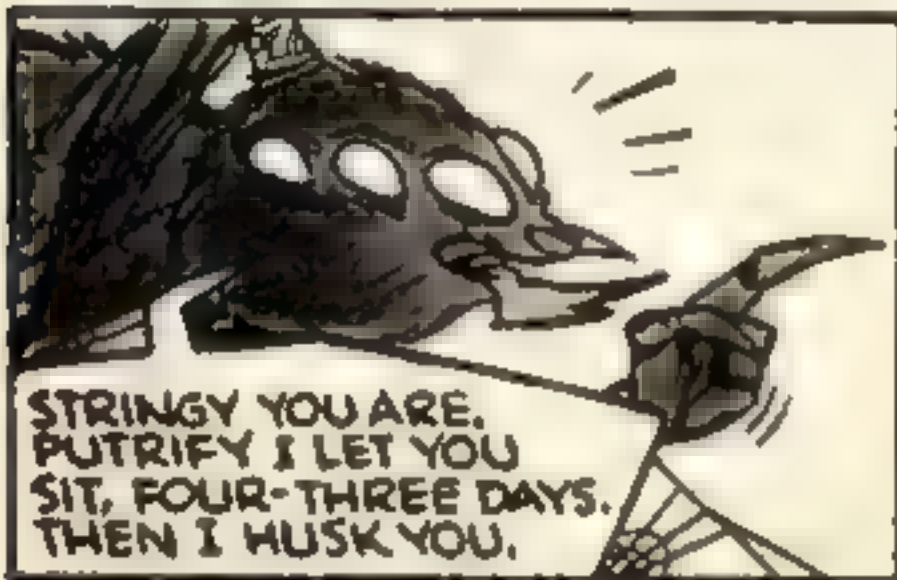
SHE WON'T LEAVE A FRIEND OF MINE IN ENEMY HANDS.

YOU! PINK ONE! CHATTERING MUST STOP. REST I WANT.

YOU'LL GET PLENTY OF REST IN THE MINES, EIGHT BALL.



STRINGY YOU ARE. PUTRIFY I LET YOU SIT, FOUR-THREE DAYS. THEN I HUSK YOU.

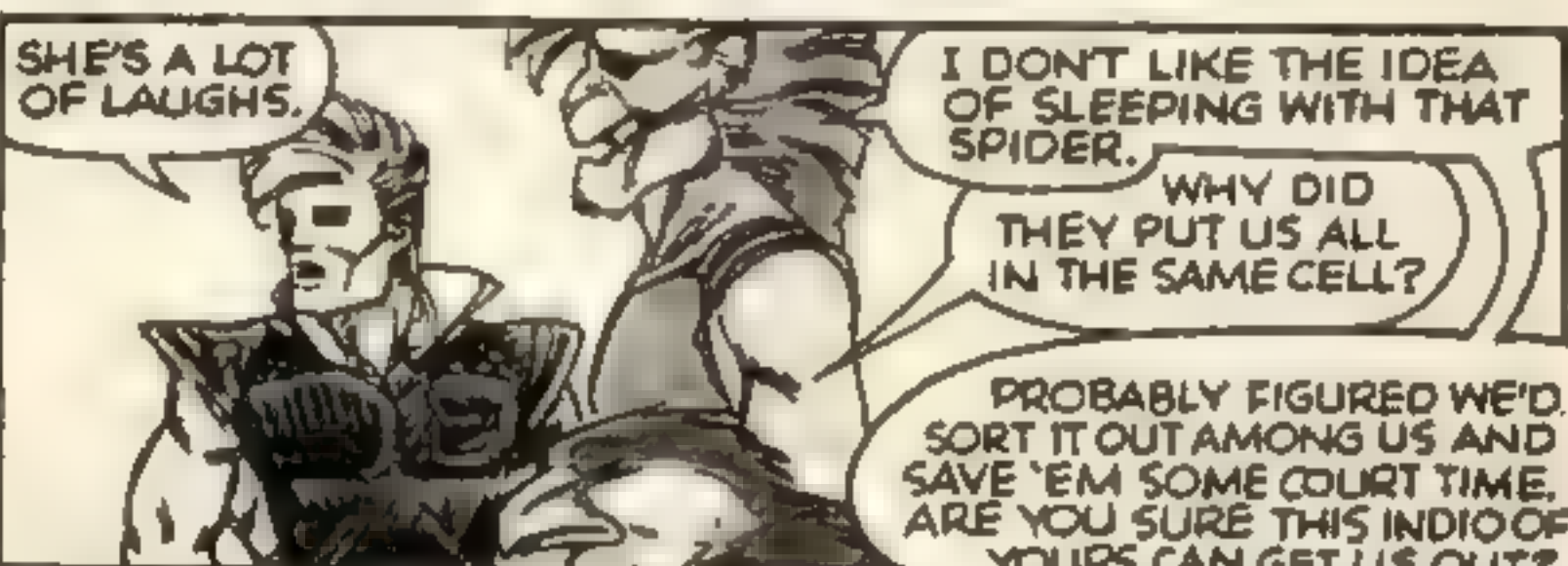


SHE'S A LOT OF LAUGHS.

I DON'T LIKE THE IDEA OF SLEEPING WITH THAT SPIDER.

WHY DID THEY PUT US ALL IN THE SAME CELL?

PROBABLY FIGURED WE'D SORT IT OUT AMONG US AND SAVE 'EM SOME COURT TIME. ARE YOU SURE THIS INDIO OF YOURS CAN GET US OUT?



HEY. SHE'D DO ANYTHING FOR THIS FACE.



I'M GOING TO BE SICK.

INDIO! SPEAK OF AN ANGEL. HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE TO GET US OUT?

ABOUT FIVE TO TEN. YOU'VE REALLY DONE IT THIS TIME.



YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND. IT WAS JUST A FRIENDLY BRAWL.

SOMEBODY ENDED UP WITH A FRIENDLY KNIFE IN THEIR THROAT. YOURS?

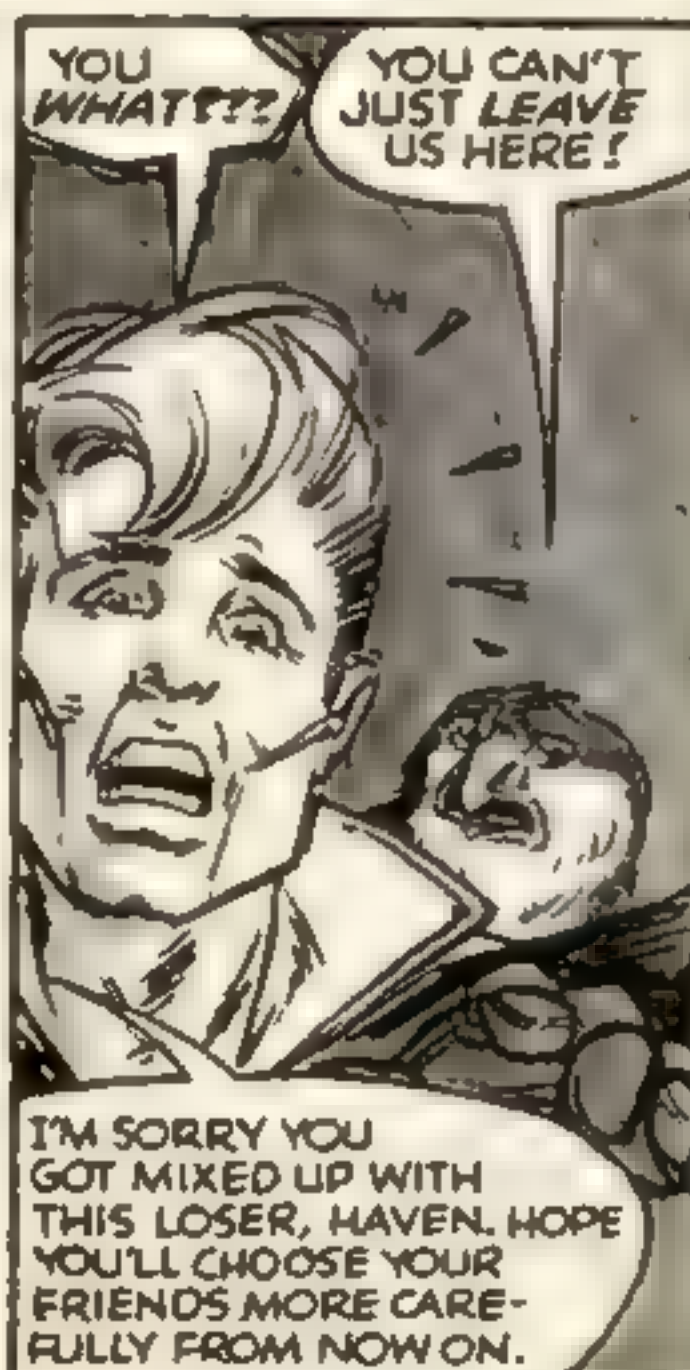
I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT IT. YOU'VE GOT TO BELIEVE ME.

IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT I BELIEVE. OR WANT TO BELIEVE. IT'S OUT OF MY HANDS, DOW. I JUST CAME TO SAY GOODBYE.



YOU WHAT???

YOU CAN'T JUST LEAVE US HERE!



I'M SORRY YOU GOT MIXED UP WITH THIS LOSER, HAVEN. HOPE YOU'LL CHOOSE YOUR FRIENDS MORE CAREFULLY FROM NOW ON.

HE'S NOT MY FRIEND!

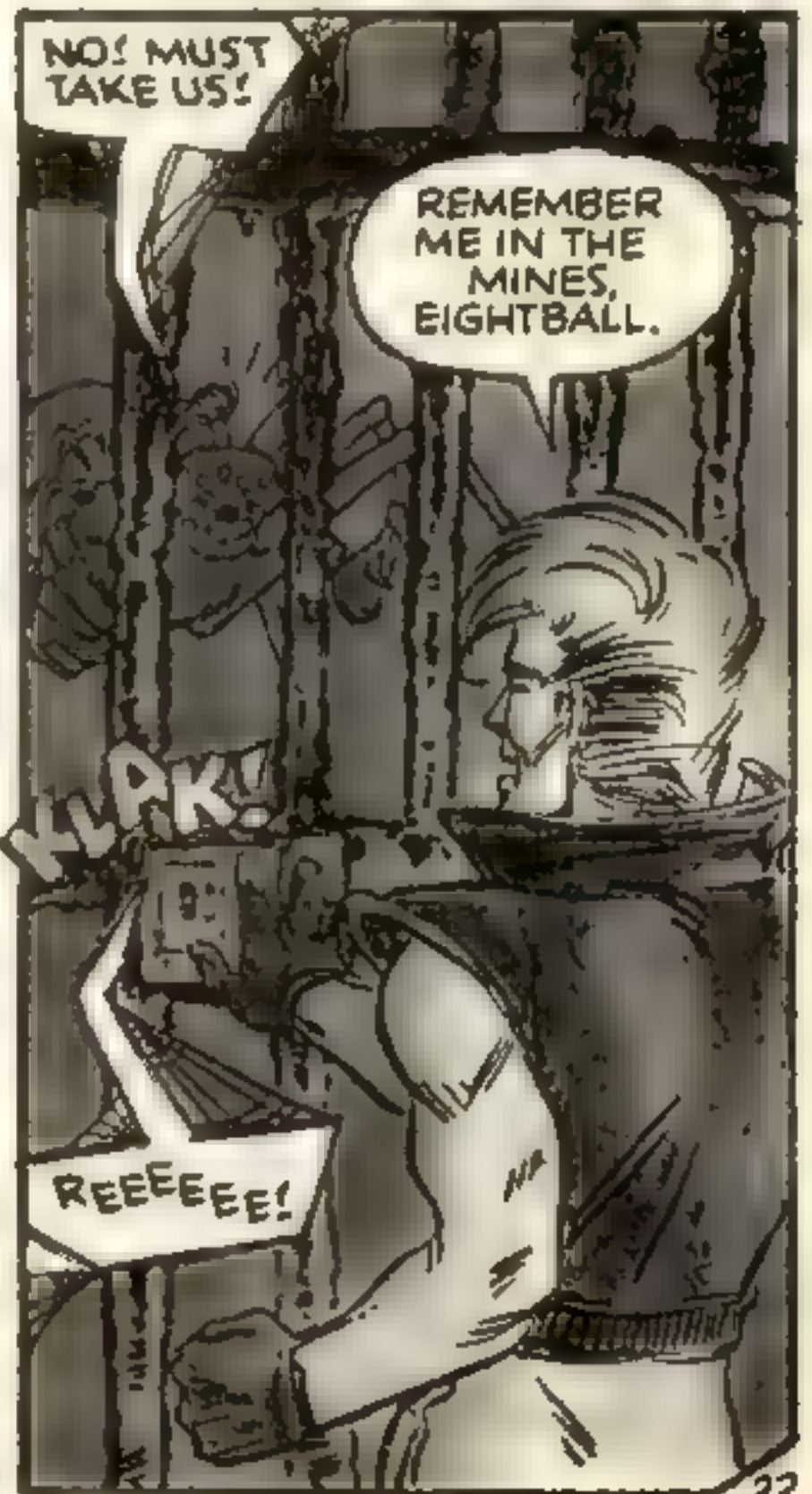
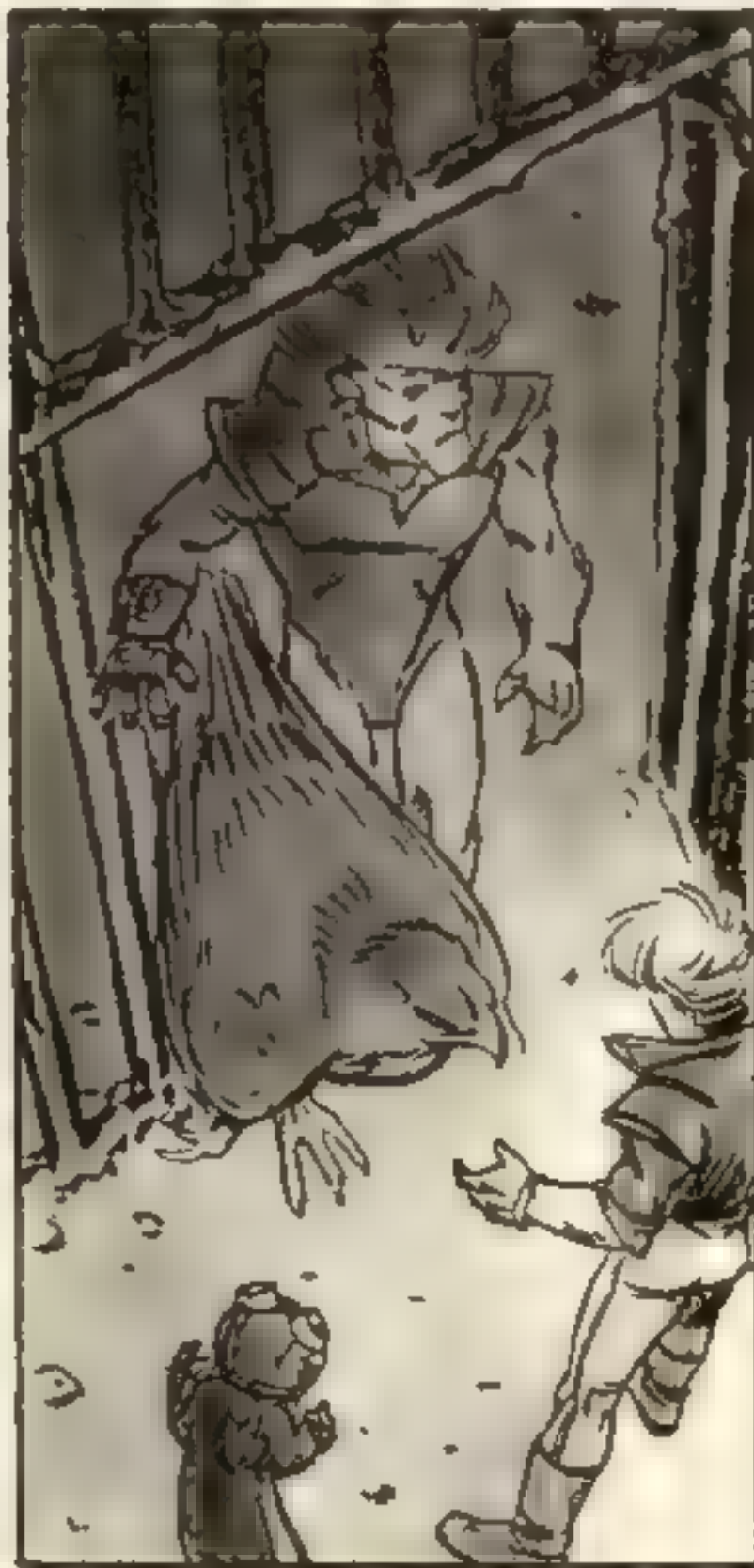
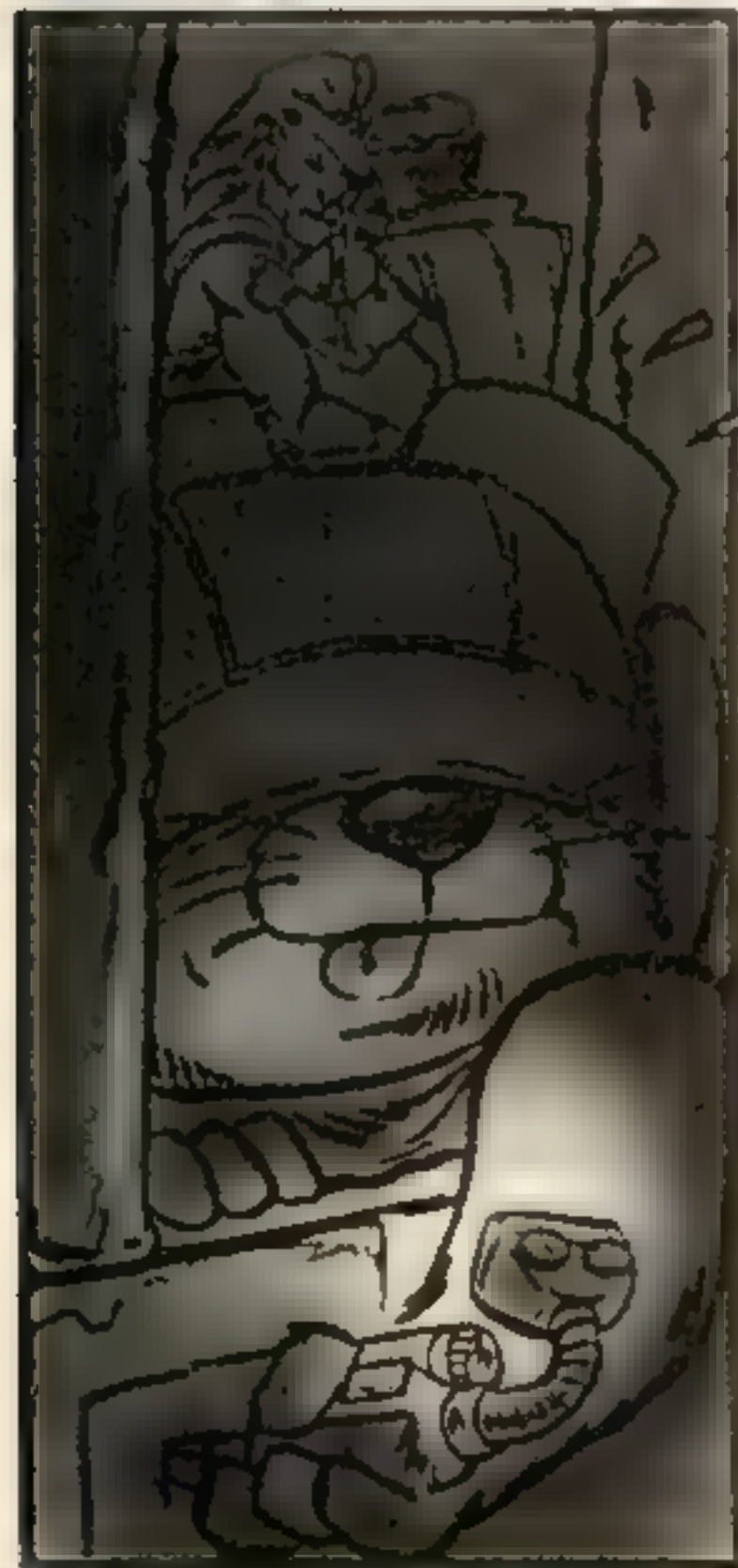
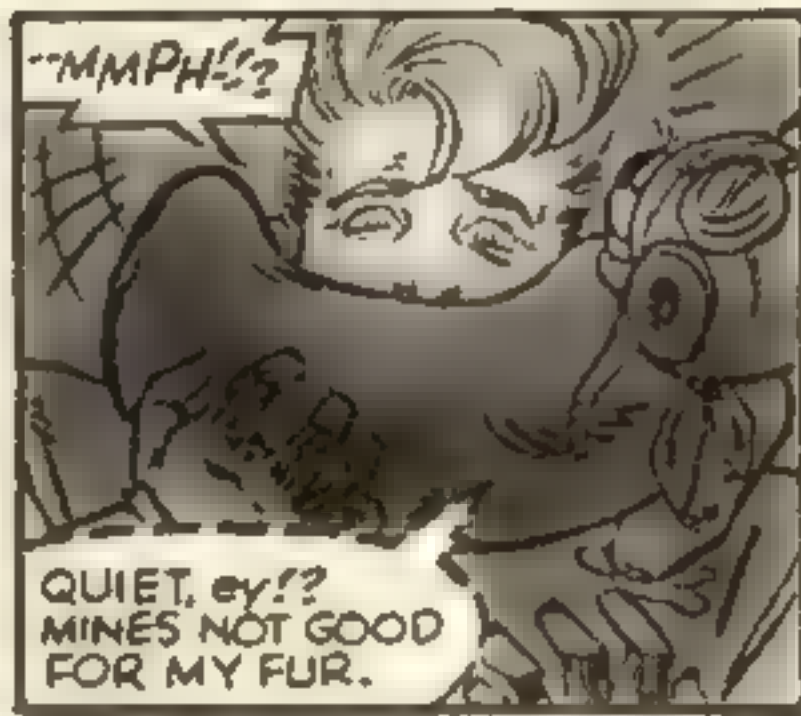
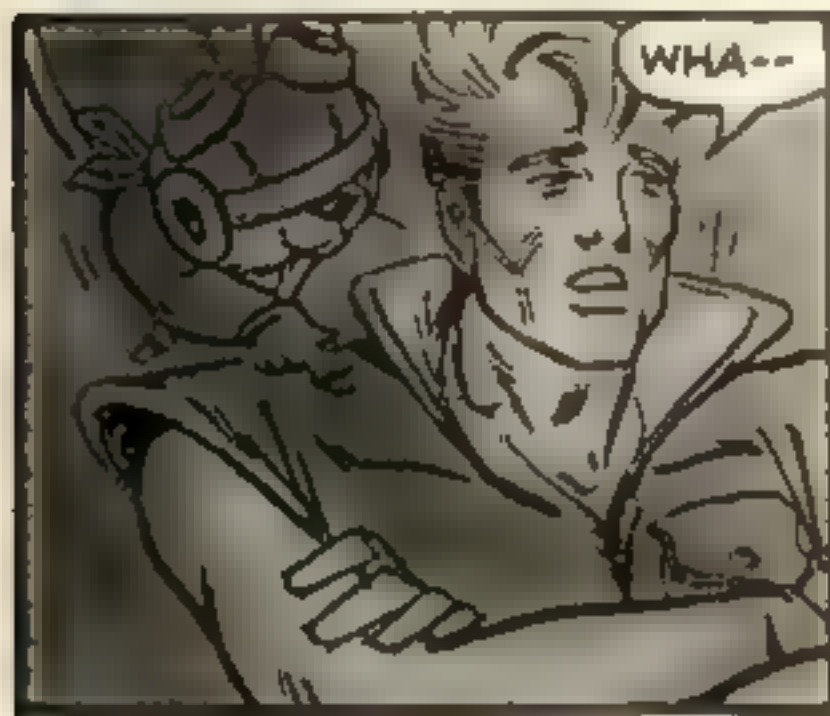
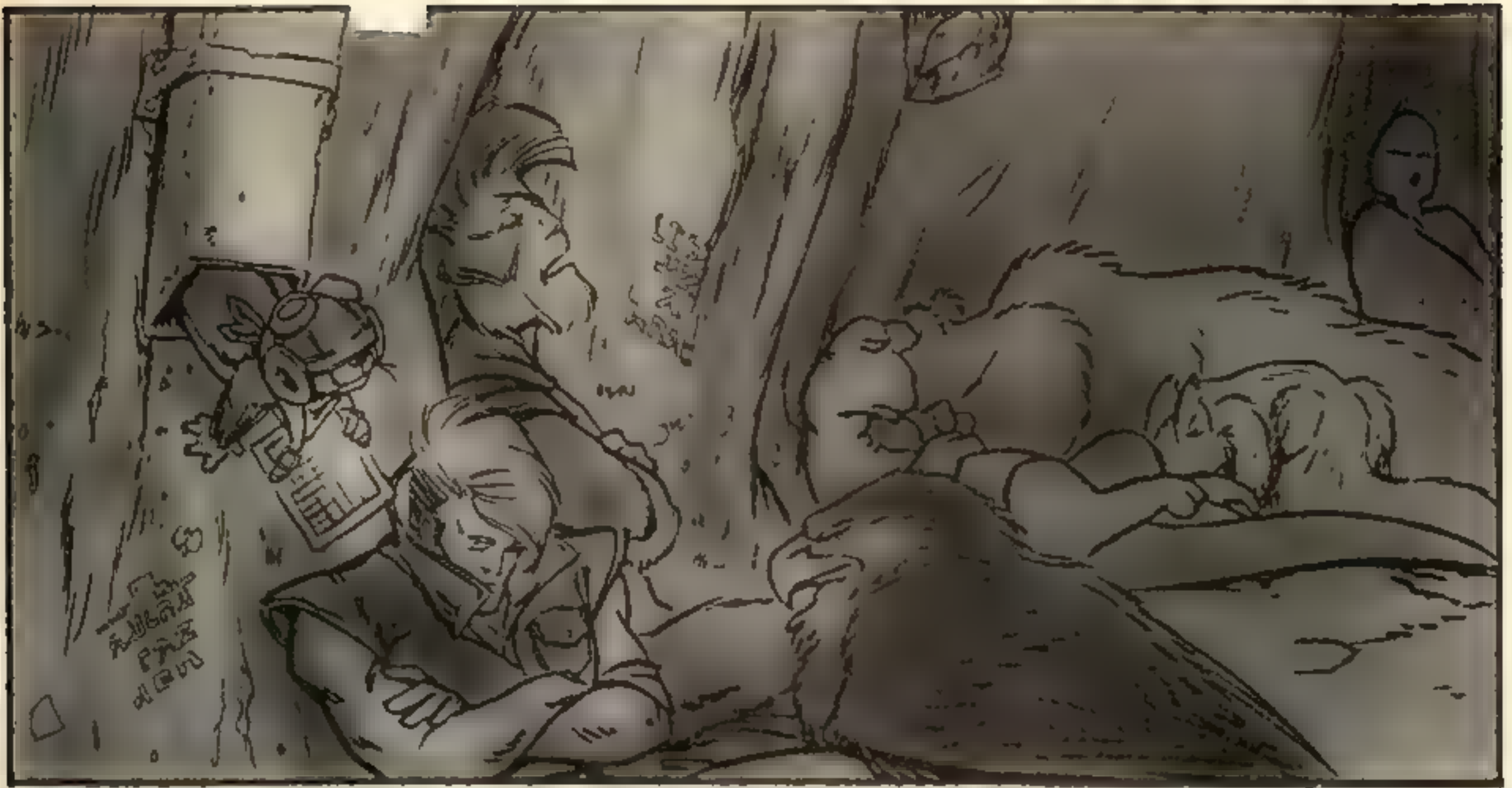
INDIO! YOU CAN'T DO THIS. AFTER ALL WE'VE ...I THOUGHT...

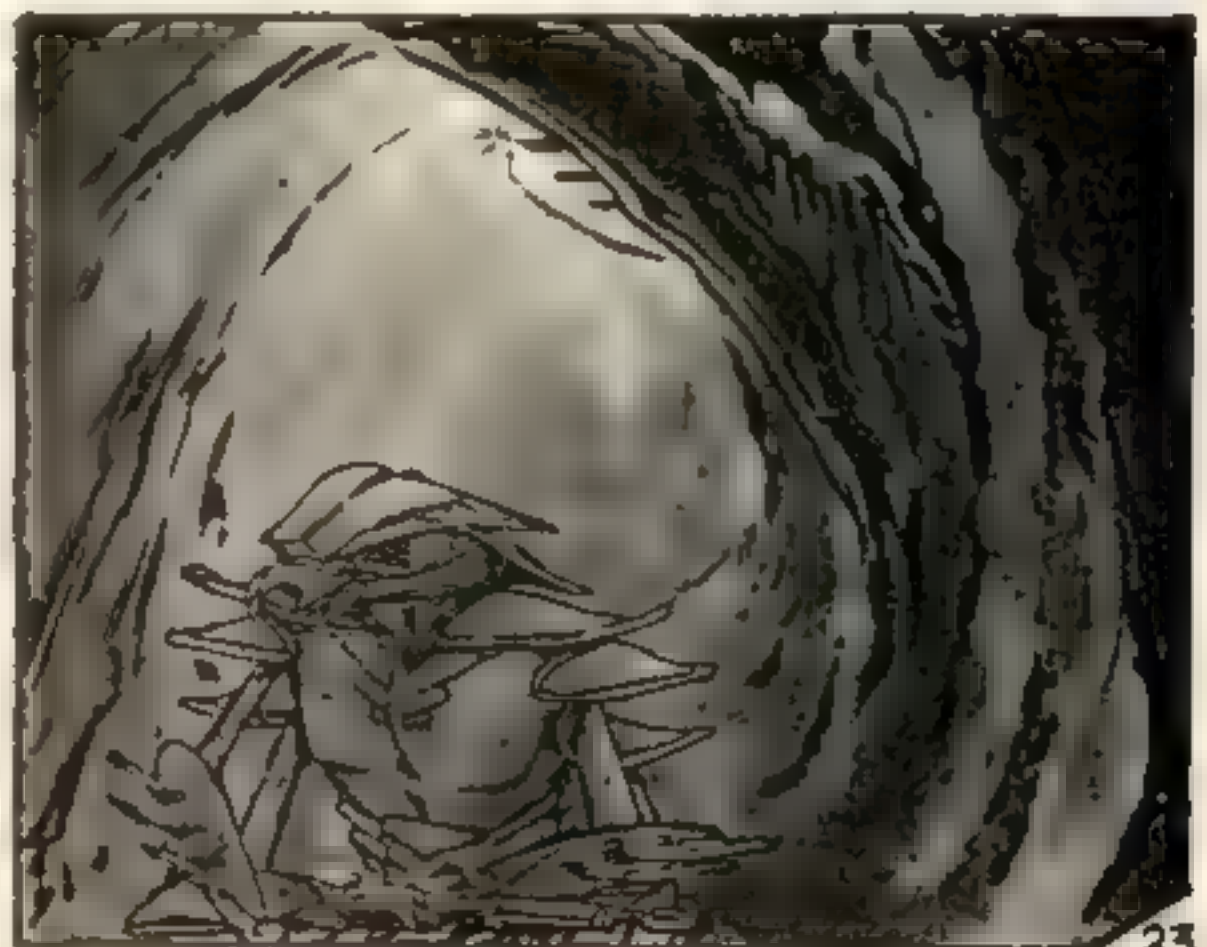
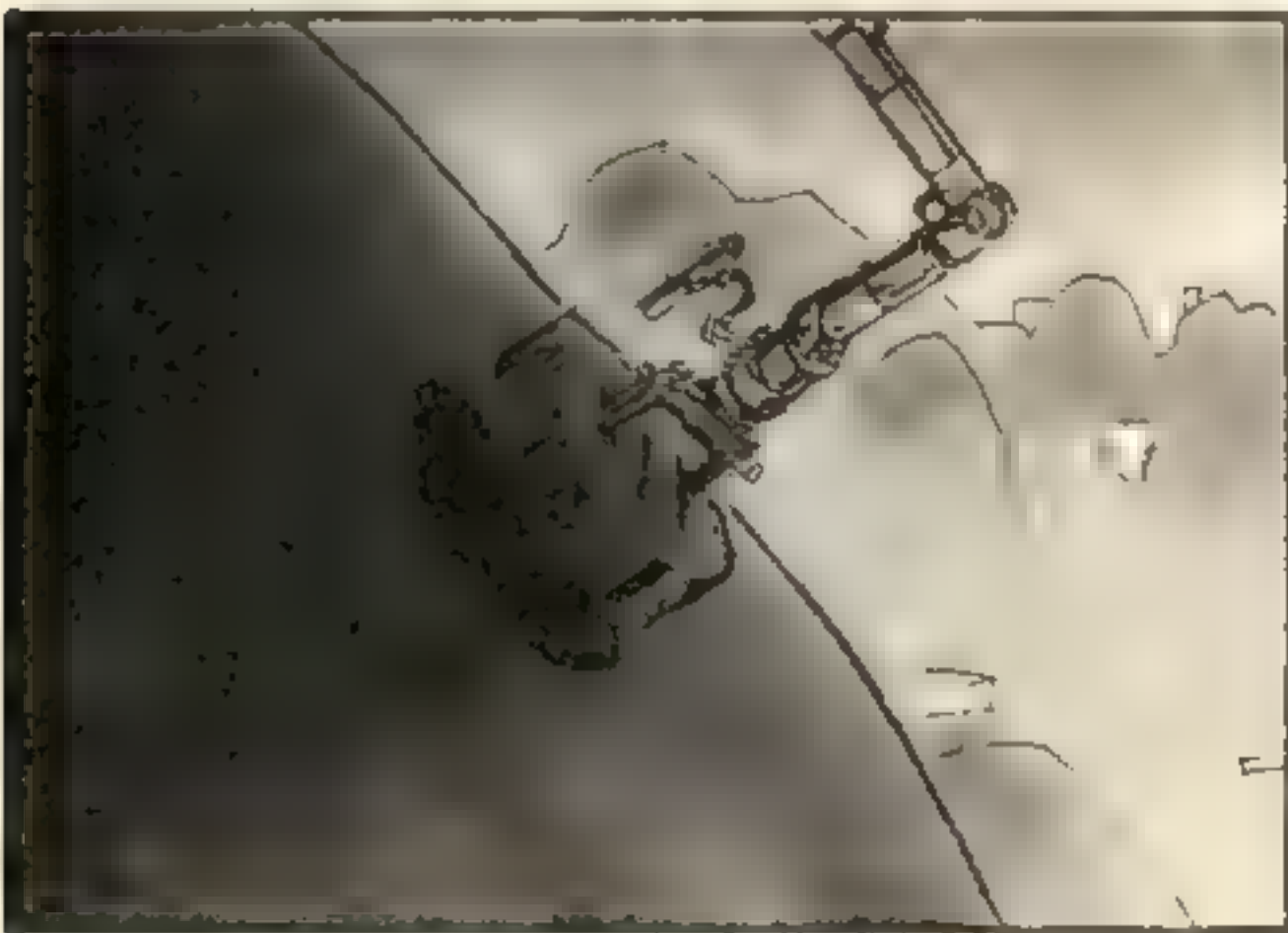
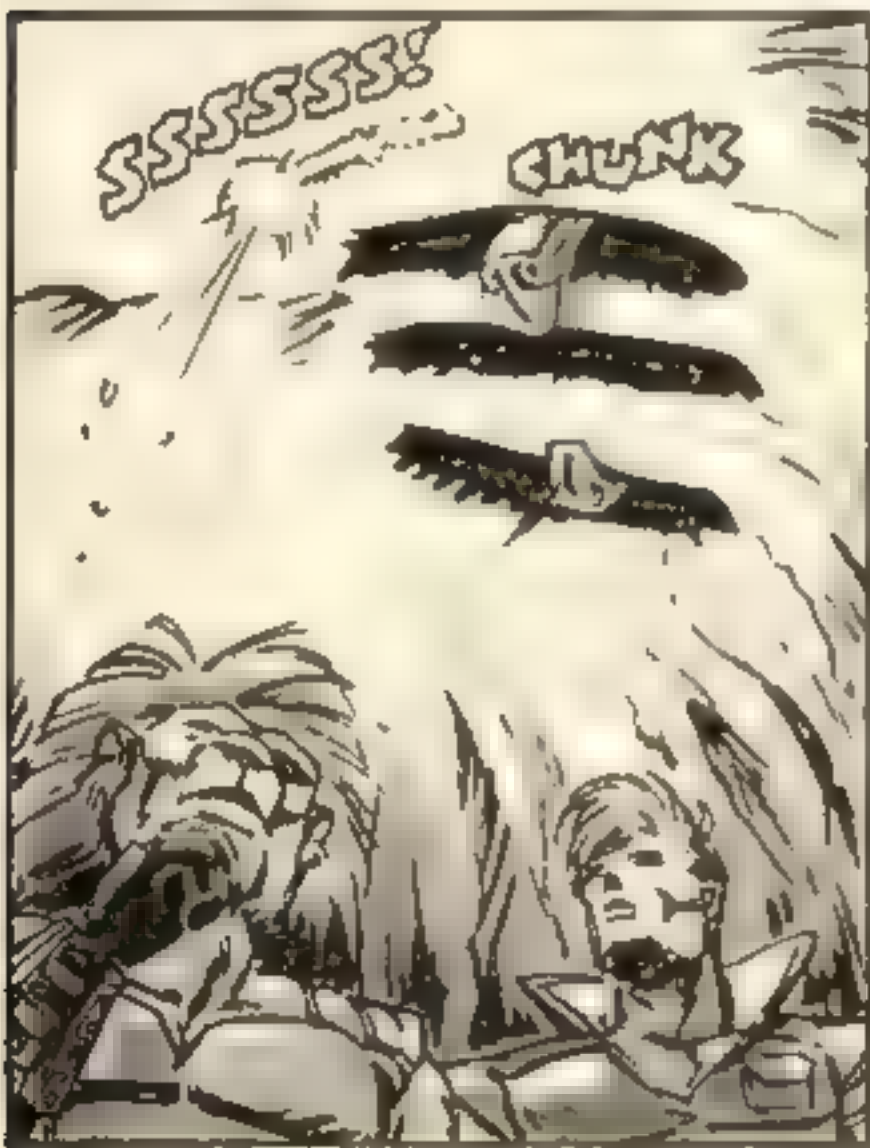
IT MUST BE LOVE.

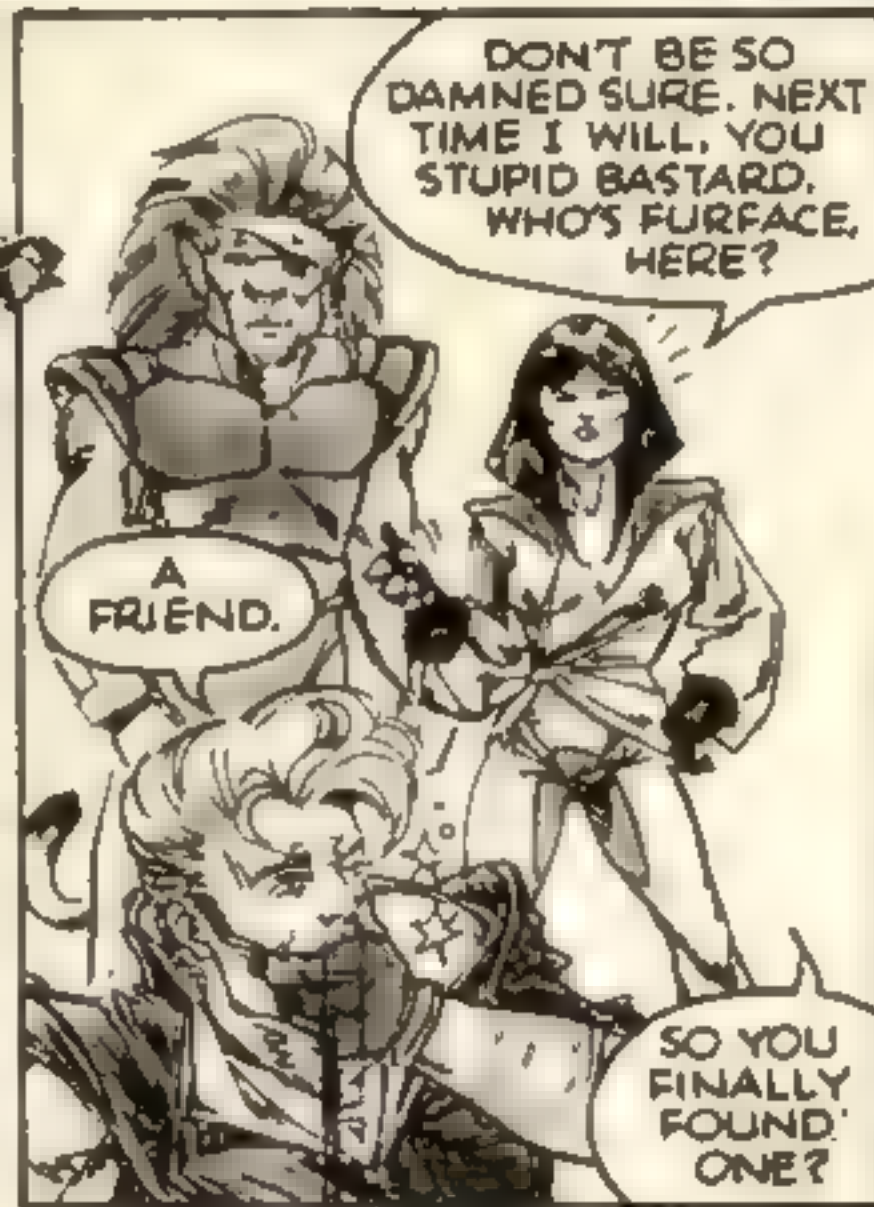
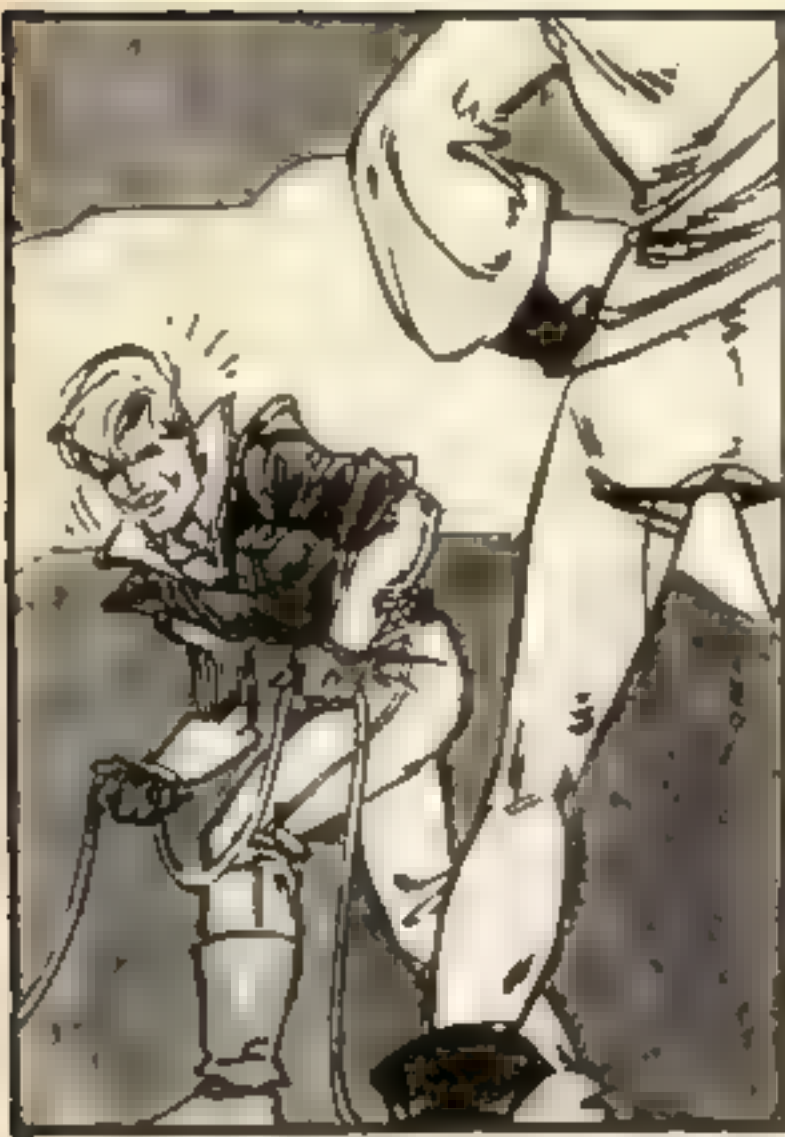
CHEE CHEE CHEE!

Oh, SHUT UP.









...TO BE CONTINUED

TAKE OFF



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Welcome to the first issue of **FUSION**! In this issue you will meet the main cast of **FUSION**, characters who will be loitering about these monochromatic pages for quite some time (that is, those members of the crew who survive the mayhem to come). In future issues we will see how this crew endures in the waning fires of a galaxy torn by a massive war.

The crew's first adventure is a five-parter called "**Soulstar Commission**." It was written by **Steven Barnes**, new to comics but certainly not new to writing. You may wish to check out some of his novels, which can be found in the science fiction section of any reasonable book store.

As far as artistic chores go, the work is pretty evenly divided between Gallacci and Dowling in a complex, arcane sort of way. Gallacci does most of the rough layout and toning, while he and Lela pretty much share the pencilling and inking. For you Gallacci fans out there, it will be harder to spot the specifics of Steve's work because of the way he adapted his work to Lela's style. One place he really stands out is with the technical details: ships, electrical stuff, ducting, etc. Lela does great ducks, but ducting? Terrible!

Then there's Lois Buhallis, a letterer so talented that it makes my ears bleed. Rounding up the creative crew is **Ken Macklin**, who will be dropping by now and then with one of his **DR. WATCHSTOP** stories. He's a genius.

That's pretty much it. If you are not already familiar with cat and Dean, then I will suggest you look up more titles in the **Eclipse** line: it speaks for what they are better than anything I could write. And what exactly is my job? Hard to say. You know how a termite needs a certain type of parasite in its digestive tract to keep it alive? Yeah, well that's the sort of the role I play.

In order to encourage letters and possibly liven up this part of the comic, there will be a contest in every issue, complete with cheap prizes! The winners will be determined by the cleverness and correctness of their answer. Originality always counts. All decisions are final. If I know you, you're probably ineligible.

The prize this month will go to the person who comes up with the most twisted, but playable, variation of draw or stud poker. Originality counts—get out your copies of Hoyle's Oh, and *anyone who suggests a lowball game using a pinochle deck will be defenestrated on general principle.*

The prize is: (really!) THE SPIDER WEBS AND DUST FROM BEHIND LELA'S BED AND A PORTRAIT OF THE ENTIRE TSUNAMI CREW DRAWN ON A BOWLING BALL! (Or if requested, the same portrait drawn on paper by both Steve and Lela.)

All answers must be received by March 1, 1987.

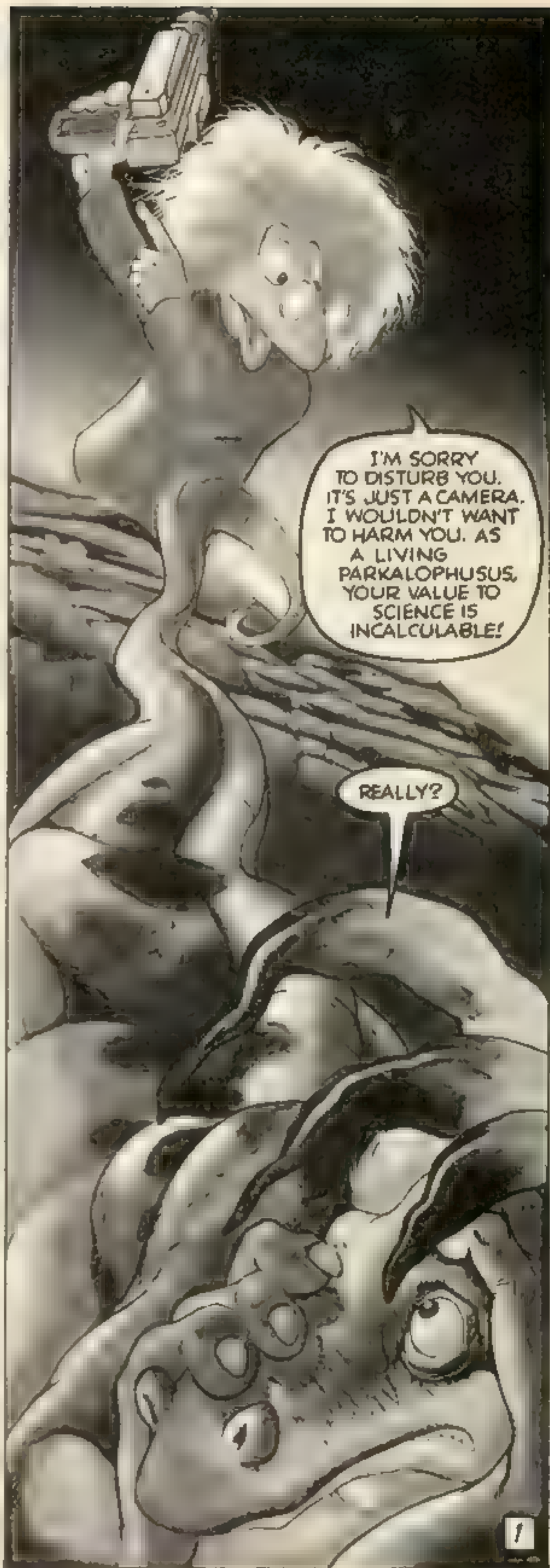
Dr. Watchstop

IN
"UNIQUE SPECIMEN"



DON'T
SHOOT!

STORY AND ART KEN MACKLIN
LETTERING L. LOIS BUHALIS



I'M SORRY
TO DISTURB YOU.
IT'S JUST A CAMERA.
I WOULDN'T WANT
TO HARM YOU. AS
A LIVING
PARKALOPHUSUS,
YOUR VALUE TO
SCIENCE IS
INCALCULABLE!

REALLY?

THIS IS WONDERFUL...
THOUGH THERE HAVE BEEN
MANY SIGNS OF YOUR
EXISTENCE, NONE HAVE
BEEN SUBSTANTIATED
WITH EVIDENCE...
UNTIL NOW, OF
COURSE.



IN TRUTH, YOU ARE THE
ONLY REMARKABLE THING
ABOUT THIS DESOLATE
WORLD.



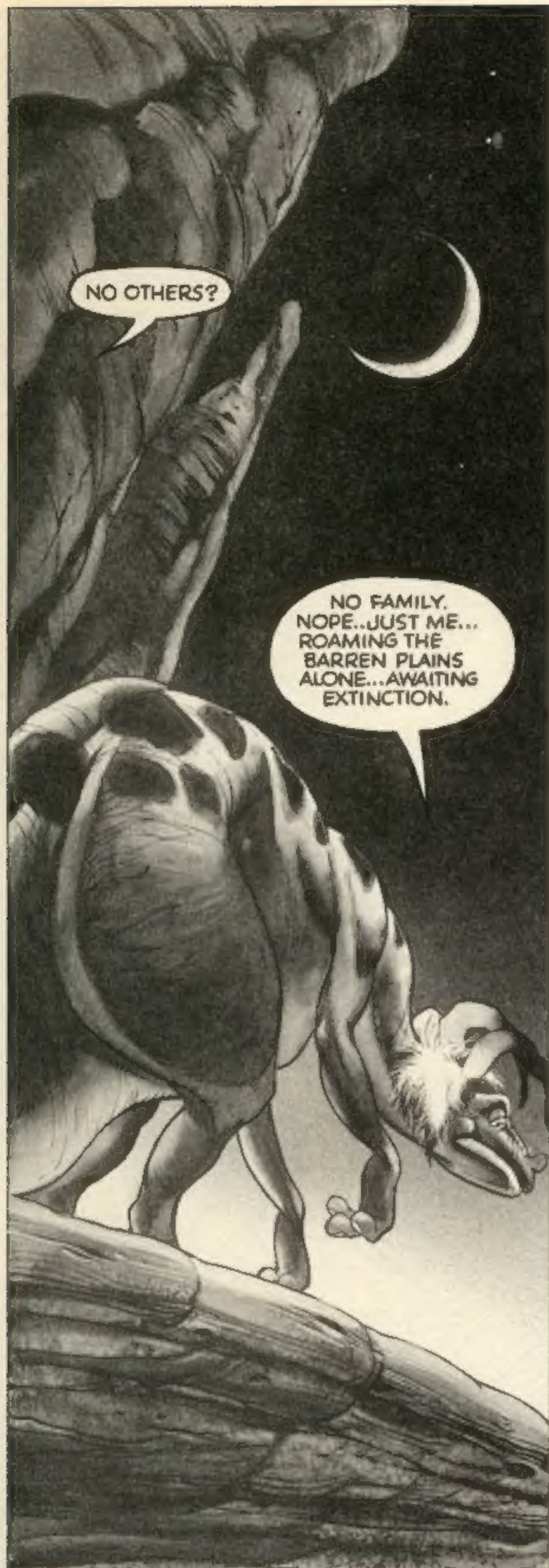
NO RESOURCES
TO INTEREST
INDUSTRIALIZED
RACES...NO ARTIFACTS
OF PAST CIVILIZATIONS,
EVEN THE GEOLOGY
IS NOT UNIQUE.

BUT NONETHELESS,
HUNDREDS OF TEAMS
OF SCIENTISTS HAVE
COMBED THIS WORLD
RECENTLY, HOPING
TO FIND THE
LEGENDARY
PARKALOPHUSUS.
THAT'S YOU!



WELL, THEY
CAN ALL STOP
LOOKING FURTHER.
I'M THE ONLY ONE
OF MY KIND.





NO OTHERS?

NO FAMILY.
NOPE...JUST ME...
ROAMING THE
BARREN PLAINS
ALONE...AWAITING
EXTINCTION.

MY HEART GOES
OUT TO YOU. I
CONFESS THAT MY
INTENTION WAS
TO OFFER YOU A
POSITION OF
PERMANENT
EXHIBIT AT THE
INTERSOLAR
ZOOLOGICAL
SOCIETY ZOO
ON POLLUX IV
WHERE ALL
YOUR NEEDS
WOULD BE
MET.

...BUT OUT
OF RESPECT
FOR YOUR
SITUATION AND
MOST PRIVATE
SADNESS, I'M
CONTENT TO
LEAVE YOU
WITH YOUR
DIGNITY AND
REPORT
NOTHING
OF THIS.

FREE FOOD
AND SHELTER FOR
LIFE...I COULD GO
FOR THAT!

WAIT!
RECONSIDER...
MY NEEDS WOULD
BE FEW... FIVE
MEALS A DAY, A
POOL... PERHAPS
SOME VIDEO
ENTERTAINMENT...

I'M SURE THE
CURATORS ON
POLLUX IV
WOULD SEE
THAT YOUR
FINAL DAYS
ARE
PLEASANT.



SO, DO
YOU THINK
IT WORKED?
SUPPOSE FRED
GETS LONELY AND
TELLS THEM THAT
THERE ARE
THREE MILLION
MORE OF US
DOWN HERE?

Oh, HE'LL
PROBABLY
GET BORED IN
A COUPLE
THOUSAND
YEARS AND SPILL
THE BEANS, BUT
AT LEAST WE'LL
HAVE SOME
PEACE AND QUIET
FOR A WHILE.



End